

Brother - Chapter 01-12

Table of Contents

1. [1](#)
2. [2](#)
3. [3](#)
4. [4](#)
5. [5](#)
6. [6](#)
7. [7](#)
8. [8](#)
9. [9](#)
10. [10](#)
11. [11](#)
12. [12](#)

1

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Chapter 1 of our [new story](#)! ^o^

One

Xu Ping's dad passed away.

The man had laryngeal cancer and was only diagnosed in the advanced stage. The surgery had only lasted fifteen minutes. The surgeon made an incision on his neck and poked around before sewing it right back up. The cancer cells had already spread to the lungs and nose cavity. The removal of infected organs was no longer a viable solution because the patient would not have lasted long after such a procedure.

The doctor took off his mask and said to Xu Ping who was waiting outside, "I'm sorry."

It took Xu Ping a while before understanding. He accepted it calmly. "How

much longer does he have?"

The doctor was surprised by his easy attitude. "Six months at the most."

Xu Ping wondered how many deaths the tumour surgeon had to face every year to be able to announce the ultimate death of the patient to their family without batting an eyelash. Although his rational side told him that this man was a doctor and he could not blame his dad's illness on a stranger, his emotional side could not help but feel hatred towards the news breaker.

The two stood in silence.

"If you could excuse me, I still have other patients to attend to." The doctor broke the awkward pause.

"Yes, of course. I just need a minute to myself," Xu Ping said with reddening eyes as he tried to control himself.

On the way to what would be the last meeting with his dad, Xu Ping passed by a flowering tree of which he did not know the name. It was blooming with tiny white flowers growing in tight-knit bundles like clouds lost in the mortal world.

He stood under the tree with his hands clasped behind his back as he watched the baby green leaves turn the noon sun into gold glitter.

Xu Ping was thirty-five that year. He worked as an editor for an up-and-coming publishing house. His workload consisted of reading the received material, finding the able writers and polishing them up. The pay was average but the satisfaction that came with it was not measurable by currency.

Xu Ping's dad was a veteran actor, Xu Chuan, who enjoyed wide recognition. The building across from Xu Ping's office still sported his advertisement for stomach medication on its wall. His hair was dashed with grey but he looked lively. Sometimes when Xu Ping would sneak a tea break and look out the windows, he would see old ladies walking with canes stop in their paths just to gawk at his dad's advertisement.

There weren't many in the publishing house that knew Xu Ping's family background, the only one being his boss and good friend, chief editor, Wang

Zedong. His friend had been surprised and studied Xu Ping's face closely.

"You've got to be kidding. You look nothing like Xu Chuan."

Xu Ping chuckled, knowing that he wasn't good looking. He didn't argue with his boss. "You'll see when you meet my brother."

Xu Ping had a younger brother, Xu Zheng.

"I've been hearing about this brother of yours for so long," Wang Zedong began to complain, "But you never once introduced him to me. What are you doing hiding him away?"

Xu Ping did not take the bait and started talking about the publishing house's budget for the first period.

For the past few months, Xu Ping had been leaving his office building at twelve-thirty sharp, walking three blocks and crossing one overpass to visit his father at the city hospital.

He had rushed past this tree every single day without ever stopping once.

On this day, however, he saw the bursting energy that this tree harboured under the sunlight. He was absolutely in awe.

The abundance of life hit him in the face like a fist and made his body burn.

Xu Ping found a young labour worker squatting by the road and handed him twenty yuan.

"Get me a branch from that tree."

The young fellow looked at Xu Ping and the tree with a frown and stayed squatting. "I'll get fined."

Xu Ping pushed at his glasses. "I'll give you twenty more."

Forty yuan to climb a tree? That was a good deal. The young man threw his cigarette butt on the ground and asked, "How many you want? I'm chargin' extra for more."

Xu Ping arrived at the hospital with a branch dotted with pinkish-white flowers and a bag of apples.

His dad looked very good that day. Xu Ping stuck the branch in a vase and placed the vase by the bed. His dad even smiled at him.

Compared with the average-looking Xu Ping, his dad had a handsome face that not even old age could spoil.

His dad had been an actor his whole life, a supporting role if there ever was one. When he was young, square-set jaws and bold brows were in. Wide shoulders and a broad frame in general were desired for a Herculean effect. He was so good-looking, however, that he had the bad-boy aura instead. When it came time for the distinctive cutie-type to gain popularity, like Andy Lau, Aaron Kwok and Edison Chen, he was already an old man.

Xu Ping grabbed a chair to sit by the bed and started peeling an apple for him.

The sickly man kept his eyes on his elder son.

He was so skinny that he was practically all bone and the veins jutted out along his arm. Eating and speaking had become extremely painful because of the cancer. Despite this frail state, not a single hair was out of place on his head.

Xu Ping cut the apple into small pieces and placed them on a plate before helping him up. The man took one piece, chewed it and swallowed it painstakingly. After, he nodded at his son with a smile, meaning it was good.

Xu Ping took out today's paper and asked in a gentle voice, "Why don't I read the paper for you, Dad?"

He nodded.

It was May 17th, 2006, a day of sunshine and peace. The paper was filled with insignificant news, as though the world was free from disasters and accidents on this day. The King of Cambodia was visiting China again. Tokyo was going to host an international summit next month. A Polish writer had been translated and published in Chinese for the first time.

He listened quietly while lying on the bed.

His throat started to hurt by the time Xu Ping finished every column. Xu Ping folded the paper back and talked about work and his brother. He stayed at the hospital in the afternoons and not much can happen in twenty-four hours, so he

finished fairly quickly.

The two sat across from each other, wordless.

Xu Ping asked after scanning around, “Do you want some water, Dad?”

His dad shook his head. Xu Ping’s own throat was so dry it could catch on fire, but he held back.

When Xu Ping finally broke the silence, he said, “I was thinking, why don’t I bring Xiao-Zheng along to visit tomorrow?”

After some thought, his dad slowly shook his head.

It was clear what his dad wanted. He didn’t want *Xiao*-Zheng to come to the hospital.

Xu Ping opened his mouth to speak but let it go in the end.

“Then I’ll come by myself tomorrow.” Xu Ping took a look at his watch and got up to leave.

His dad made a writing motion with his right hand. Xu Ping took out a pen and paper from his bag.

With a shaking hand, his dad wrote:

“Don’t abandon your brother.”

Xu Ping felt a sting in his nose and tears threatened to burst forth.

“What are you saying, Dad. He’s my brother. I’d never just leave him!”

His dad wrote another line.

“Don’t tell him. He doesn’t understand.”

Don’t tell him. Don’t tell him what?

Xu Ping felt terrified but did not dare show it on his face. He nodded furiously, “Don’t worry, Dad.”

“Is there anything else you’d like for me to do?” he inquired softly.

His dad shook his head and handed the pen and paper back to Xu Ping. He patted Xu Ping’s right hand and tried to raise his hand higher, but he hadn’t the strength to.

Xu Ping held his bony hand up to his face.

Their fingers were of the same shape and size. The knuckles protruded a little and the index finger was longer than usual.

Xu Ping thought, this really is my dad. We share the same blood. The creator even made my hand to look exactly like his.

But this man is about to die.

Unable to fight back the emotions, he let out a cry, "Dad!"

His dad pulled a smile and winked at Xu Ping.

An actor his whole life, he no longer needed language to speak.

What he said was, "Alright. I'll see you tomorrow, son."

The term used to describe the type of face popular during Xu Chuan's youth is literally "face like the character 国". Here is a face said to be so.



Here are pictures of the other stars mentioned in the chapter to have a similar face as Xu Chuan.



Andy Lau



Aaron Kwok



Edison Chen

(they just get pointier and pointier, don't they???)

ayszhang: Here is the first chapter! I apologize but this story won't have a patterned release schedule, but I will put it up on the sidebar (top on mobile) when I know. I do have to say that I think this story might be a better read in one go since chapters skip through time and space, but I will leave that up to you :)



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2

Translator: ayszhang

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Chapter 2 of [Brother!](#)

Two

1983

Xu Ping ended late today because the class meeting of year six division three at Railroads No.1 Elementary went overtime.

He packed up and when he rushed out of the classroom, he ran straight into Lu Jia. Usually, the boys would get into a fight but today the homeroom teacher, Mrs. Li, was in the hallway. Lu Jia only made a disdainful snort and pushed past him.

Lu Jia had just been scolded by the teacher at the meeting. He was often late to class and the first to leave. He chitchatted during self-study time and even copied homework. The teacher made him reflect on his wrongs in front of the class.

Lu Jia glared daggers at Xu Ping when he stepped down from the podium as if to say, “Just you wait, you little shit!”

Xu Ping didn’t even bother to care.

He was busy wondering how long the meeting was going to continue and worrying that Xu Zheng would get impatient.

As he ran home, he passed by the book stand where his schoolmates had gathered. He remembered that today was the release of book five of *Heroes of Sui and Tang*, but he didn’t have the time to buy it now.

He opened the door with the key around his neck to find the eight-year-old Xu Zheng on a chair by the window with his legs tucked into his chest.

“Okay, let’s go,” the sweaty Xu Ping said to his brother without even stopping for a drink.

Xu Zheng glanced at the wall clock and then at his brother. He pouted. “Five-thirty.”

Xu Ping wiped the sweat on his forehead. “I got held up in class. I didn’t mean to.

“Five-thirty!” Xu Zheng repeated loudly.

Xu Ping took a glimpse at the clock and shrugged. “Yeah, we’re thirty minutes late.”

“Sandbox time is five o’clock!”

If this were any other person, even Xu Ping’s dad, Xu Ping would have lost his temper by now.

But Xu Zheng was a different story.

He was a special child.

Xu Ping tried to suppress his anger. “We can go at five-thirty, too. Come on.”

Xu Zheng sat there hugging his knees and shouted to the ceiling, “Five o’clock! Not five-thirty!”

Xu Ping was about to lose it. Who even bothered with these minute details? It was just sand. “What’s the difference between five and five-thirty?”

Xu Zheng looked at his brother. "You said. Five o'clock. Sandbox time!" He tapped his own head. "You said. I remember!"

Xu Ping was angry now. He knew his brother had a mild deficiency but had never found him this immature and annoying. "Well, now I say five-thirty is sandbox time, alright? Are you going or not? I still have homework to do!"

They engaged in tug-of-war with their eyes.

Xu Ping didn't back down. He was twelve already, well past the age to play with sand. If not for this retard brother of his, he would be participating in extracurricular activities, not going to the sandbox at five every single day!

Xu Zheng jumped down from the chair with his head hanging low, and he pulled out a red metal bucket from under the table. Inside were a shovel and a ball.

Going to the sandbox at five everyday was Xu Zheng's daily chore. His brother had promised him. They had even pinky swore and everything. He remembered it perfectly.

His brother was the bad one!

The more he thought about it, the more aggrieved he felt. He dragged the bucket noisily along the ground.

Xu Ping was so baffled by this he could laugh.

This brat! If he wasn't my brother, and if my brother wasn't a retard, I'd...I'd...

Xu Ping didn't know how to finish that thought, but he did know that his life would be a hundred times better without his brother holding him back. He could join extracurricular activities like other kids, read comics afterschool, attend the spring and autumn fieldtrips, and most importantly, he wouldn't have to suffer the talk behind his back from his classmates.

"Xu Ping is the retard's brother."

Xu Ping felt a slap on his face from the burning shame whenever he heard that.

Xu Zheng was still dragging the bucket out the door while Xu Ping had already

turned and headed down the stairs.

The bucket wasn't light by any means, and Xu Zheng could not carry it for long. Usually, Xu Ping would help him carry it with a frown, but today he merely watched from the corner of his eye his dumb brother shuffling along with great effort. He felt a sudden burst of fury and yelled, "What are you doing? Get a move on! Do you still want to go or not!"

Xu Zheng kept his head down in silence.

Xu Ping likely would have given in if he could have whined a little like a normal eight year old, or maybe complain about the bucket being too heavy for him.

But Xu Zheng didn't. He didn't know how to. Even if he did, he wouldn't. He was angry at his brother too, as much as Xu Ping was angry at him. He dragged the bucket along, hitting it on each step as he came down, filling the stairwell with clanging.

Seeing his brother acting up, Xu Ping only became more enraged. He scoffed and walked ahead.

The two brothers arrived at the sandbox in the courtyard. It used to be filled with kids play fighting and throwing bean bags, and such. Recently, the Informatics Centre next door relocated and the building had yet to be demolished. The neighbourhood children began to play there instead.

Xu Ping swung his army green bag off his shoulder and plopped down under the shade of a tree.

It was September but the Indian summer was vicious. The ground was baked by the sun and it took some wiggling around for Xu Ping to find a comfortable spot.

He took out his workbook from the bag. The assignment today was a six hundred word essay. The topic was "My cute ____" and the student could insert a person or animal in the blank, such as "brother," "sister," "kitten," or "puppy."

Speak of the devil! Xu Ping just about poked a hole in the page with his pencil.

Only then did Xu Zheng shuffle past him with the bucket. There was a huge, purple bloody bruise on his knee that made his skin look pale and sickly. He was

wearing a red tank top with a pair of blue shorts that was faded from the numerous washes and a pair of grey sandals, and he sported a buzz cut on his head.

Xu Ping looked down and pretended to work on his assignment.

Mom died early. Dad was often away because of the performances of the [Cultural Troupe](#). As for his only brother...

Xu Ping crossed out the possibility of "My cute brother" with a giant red marker in his mind.

What about cats or dogs? Xu Ping resorted to animals.

But they never had a pet.

Xu Ping had once found a litter of kittens abandoned by their mother in a rumpled cardboard box on the brink of starving. He brought them home and tried to feed them congee, but the kittens wouldn't eat it and only kept mewling. He held each of them dear in his arms and petted them affectionately. However, his dad threw the three pitiful creatures out when he came home from work that night, regardless how much Xu Ping pleaded.

"What kind of brother are you? Don't you know your brother is allergic to cat fur?!"

Xu Ping even had a crying session because of this without anyone knowing.

His retard brother had always been the most important. He had to remember that he was, before anything else, "Xu Zheng's brother".

Xu Ping wondered what had happened to those cats afterwards as he stuck the pencil behind his ear like smokers do with their cigarette. They probably died of hunger the next day after getting thrown out.

But he couldn't write about that in his essay. Though no one in particular taught him, he knew that the ugly and the painful could not be written even if it was the truth.

Mom died.

Dad threw away the kittens.

I hate my brother.

Who would want to see that? And if his dad found out, he would get some quality time with the belt too.

The teacher said, they must aim for the sky and be positive.

For instance, the essays written by fellow elementary school kids in the book, “Essay King” that he bought, nine out of ten began with “It was a beautiful day. The sun was shining and there wasn’t a cloud in the sky” as though it never rained and snowed in the year.

Xu Ping brought the pencil from his left ear to his right, then from his right to his left. Even then, his page remained blank.

He glanced over at his brother.

Xu Zheng was engrossed with the sand. He shovelled sand into the bucket, packed it in tightly, and then turned the bucket upside down to leave a pillar of sand.

Frankly, Xu Ping didn’t see the fun in doing this, but Xu Zheng could do the same movements over and over for minutes, even hours, until all the sand was gone.

Xu Ping puckered his lips and returned to staring aimlessly at the sky.

He got glared at by Lu Jia at the class meeting. Lu Jia was always a spiteful child and they still had bad blood between them from the incident with his little brother, Lu Xi. Now, there was another score to settle. Xu Ping thought as he rubbed his nose.

Lu Jia lived in the same complex and attended the same elementary. His brother, Lu Xi, was a year younger than Xu Zheng and was in year two at the school. He had tiny eyes and a flat nose, but was a clever kid who always had a smile on his face. He greeted everyone dearly and had a mouth as sweet as honey. When New Year's came along, he received more red pockets than any other kid.

Now, Xu Zheng, on the other hand, had adorable looks but had mush for

brains. He either hid from people or stood there like a dummy, unwilling to speak even when pushed. Other than arguing with Xu Ping, Xu Zheng was a closed clam even with their father.

Xu Ping shot a disappointed look at his brother.

The oblivious target of which was still in the sandbox scooping sand into the bucket. His lateral profile resembled that of Xu Chuan, clearly defined with a tall nose. Only his eyes, however, were not as strong and slanted, but rather round and large. They made him look like a dumb and loyal puppy when they gazed at you.

Xu Ping fought back the shudders and turned away to relieve them.

How could a retard that always brought trouble be as cute as a puppy?!

He must have been mad!

As Xu Ping raged at himself, he stomped on the topic “My cute brother” until it fractured to bits and pieces.

Unable to come up with an essay topic, Xu Ping took out his knife and began sharpening his pencils.

He had five Chung Hwa pencils in his metal pencil case. The body was red and black, and it was topped with a pink eraser. “China Shanghai Chung Hwa Brand” was printed on the black side with a small golden mark.

Xu Ping organized them according to length on the ground from longest to shortest and shaved off the wooden chips like a gardener would his garden.

He had long and strong fingers that curved upward at the tip. He was skilled with his hands and made even pencil sharpening look swift and graceful.

His homeroom teacher, Mrs. Li, had once said, “You must be good at taking care of others.”

Xu Ping thought long and hard with a frown about how his teacher came to such a conclusion. The ultimate explanation was that his teacher had probably been fooled by his average face.

He actually was extremely impatient, had a bad temper and hated taking care of others.

Xu Ping flicked the shavings away and stood up for a stretch.

He wondered if the new volume of *Heroes of Sui and Tang* had been sold out yet.

The story had left off at the part where [Cheng Yaojin](#) was taught how to use the war axe through a dream. He was taught three manoeuvres: the skull cracker, the jaw breaker and the neck chopper. These were extremely deadly and, with the first alone, he was able to take General Luo Fang's life and take back the tribute that Yang Lin made to the government, which led to his cousin, Qin Qiong, being asked to deal with him by the police.

He wondered as to what happened afterwards while he twisted his neck.

There were many others in his class who were addicted to these comics. The storylines were fresh and the illustrations were beautiful too, making the fight scenes extra exciting. It was one of the most unique of its kind and had the boys under its spell. They would go to the bookstand every other day to see if the new volume had arrived.

Just thinking about it made Xu Ping fidget with anxiety.

He wasn't going to make any progress with the essay so why not go to the bookstand while it was still light.

He glanced at Xu Zheng in the sandbox.

Xu Zheng was only a third of the way through the sand, and since this was Xu Zheng, who was as flexible as metal, he wouldn't stop until the very last grain.

The mounds of sand that looked like ugly blemishes only annoyed Xu Ping.

He didn't understand Xu Zheng's life.

Xu Zheng would wake up at six-thirty every morning and be sent to school for the special by Xu Ping at seven-thirty. The teacher would bring him home at four-thirty and he would go to the sandbox with Xu Ping at five. After making thirty identical piles of sand, he would return home for supper. Shower would come after supper and bedtime was nine o'clock sharp. He would close his eyes and

when they opened again, it would be the next day which would be the exact same as the day before.

What kind of life was that?

Xu Ping would find it hard to breathe and wanted to run from it, but everyday he would still go home afterschool and take his brother out to play.

He hated it!

He hated his idiotic brother but at the same time, he hated himself for being a wuss.

But Xu Zheng was like caramel that refused to come loose.

Xu Zheng wasn't close with anyone. Not even their dad could get a few words out of him. He only knew to hold on to Xu Ping, and only Xu Ping.

"Hey."

No one answered.

"Xiao-Zheng!"

Only after a long time did Xu Zheng turn his head around slowly to take one glance at him before returning to his sand.

"Stop playing. I'll take you to the bookstand."

Xu Zheng didn't stop what he was doing.

"Are you listening?!"

Xu Zheng didn't respond.

Xu Ping squashed a sand pile under his foot. "What's wrong with you? Did you not hear me?!"

Xu Zheng slowly turned his head around, looking at the scattered sand for a while and then looking up at Xu Ping.

"I'm going to the bookstand. Are you coming?"

Xu Zheng turned back around and started shovelling faster. The shovel scraped the bucket, making clanging noises.

"He's probably still mad at me," Xu Ping thought.

He couldn't be bothered. He packed up his bag and swung it over his shoulder.

"If you're not coming then stay here and play with your sand, and I'll come back for you later." He added after a pause, "Don't run off with strangers. I'll bring you a popsicle when I come back."

Xu Zheng didn't speak.

"Did you hear me?" Xu Ping slapped his brother's shoulder.

Xu Zheng turned his shoulder away.

"Yes!" he shouted angrily.

Xu Ping was far too excited for *Heroes of Sui and Tang* to care.

He reached into his pocket for the two [yuan](#) his dad left him before leaving. A popsicle cost five cents and the comic book was thirty-five cents. That left him with...

Xu Ping calculated with his fingers as he skipped away merrily.



The comic book series



An illustration of Cheng Yaojin and his weapon.



The Chung Hwa pencil that Xu Ping uses.

(I used these in elementary school too!!!)

ayszhang: Here's the second chapter~ As you can see, they are not terribly long so the progress with TDDUP won't really be held back. After I finish TDDUP, I might be able to release 7-8 chapters a month (if I don't start another story that is). This week is finals week for me. Have tons of stuff due and tests T_T so only one chapter of Brother from me next Friday. After the 22nd, I will have so much free time so expect more starting in mid-Feb :)

[One](#)

[Three](#)



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3

Translator: ayszhang

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Chapter 3 of [Brother!](#)

Three

If you were to jump the fence on the west side of the No. 1 Elementary, walk through an alley and past the Women's Alliance, you would find yourself at Xinmin Road.

This road would be renovated to several times its current width twenty years down the road. The white poplars would be cut down, the greenery instead placed in a narrow strip down the centre. The Women's Alliance would also be relocated and the building sold to the Japanese to build a department store. New, foreign brands filled the tall building – Prada, Louis Vuitton, Marc Jacobs – of which Xu Ping wouldn't even be able to afford one pant leg with his monthly paycheque as editor.

The Xinmin Road in 1983, however, was just another street in the city where poplars stood tall against the clear, baby blue sky. Cars were rare while bicycles

made up nearly all of the traffic, evident from the amount of tinkling bells. The street was lined with a few restaurants, state-run stores and many vendors and stands. You could find everything from popsicles and [tea eggs](#) to tailors sewing at a temporary folding table and a tent functioning as a bookstand selling comics.

The twelve-year old Xu Ping sprinted from home so fast that his [red scarf](#) flew over his shoulder. He pushed to the front of the crowd but before he could ask if Heroes of Sui and Tang had arrived, he was stopped by a holler.

“Oi, what’s the big idea!”

He turned to find a dark, stocky boy beside him. It was none other than his classmate, He Zhi.

“Hey, [Da](#)-Zhi! You’re here too?”

“Xu Ping!”

The two gave up their spot in the front and backed away with He Zhi’s arm around the smaller boy’s neck.

“What you doin’ here today? You’re always running off right at the bell!”

“Don’t remind me! I’m not supposed to be here. I need to go back soon.”

He Zhi eyed him as he spoke.

Xu Ping didn’t notice and continued to ask, “Did the fifth book come out?”

The bigger boy waved a book in the air. “I just got it.” Then he added, “The last one.”

“No way!” Xu Ping gasped. “You’re lying!” With that, he pushed back into the crowd and, seconds later, came back, shoulders drooping.

“All sold out.”

He Zhi chuckled. “All sold out.”

Xu Ping was furious. “You took my book, you bastard!”

He Zhi shrugged. “You’re the one who came too late.”

Xu Ping had steam coming out of his ears. “Me? If I didn’t have to—”

He stopped abruptly.

"Have to do what?"

"Nothing," Xu Ping sighed. "Whatever. I have to go home and practise the erhu."

He Zhi flashed a secretive smile. "C'mon, Ping-zi. What's the rush? Tell me, is playin' with sand fun?"

It took Xu Ping a moment before jumping in rage. "How the fuck did you know?!"

He swore.

He Zhi was taken back as well. "Wait, so it's true?" He scratched his head. "I didn't take you to be...."

Xu Ping was seething with anger.

Someone else in his class had asked him before why he never did any activities after school. He had used "family matters" as an excuse for some time before lying about daily erhu lessons that his father had arranged for him. He was so embarrassed he was busted that he was angry. He seemed to have forgotten that He Zhi was a head taller than he was, and grabbed the boy's collar. "Who told you! Was it that fucking Lu Jia?! He's gonna get a piece of me!"

He Zhi peeled the smaller boy's hands off. "Hey, hey, use your words. I have a thing about people messing with my clothes."

This basically meant it was true.

Xu Ping plopped down on the curb with his head in his arms.

"Man, it's just playin' sand with your brother! Why the temper tantrum?" He Zhi sat down beside him, laughing. "We all got sibling troubles—"

"Shut up and go away." Xu Ping turned away and continued to brood.

"And here I was wondering why you always seem to get diarrhea before the class performance for Children's Day. And you know, my mom comes home praising you like you're some angel, said you were nice and quiet and good at writing and even knew how to play the erhu. To think that all these years I've

been gettin' scolded for nothing, and here you are gettin' mad at me? What did I do to get this?"

"Well, you deserve it!"

"Oi! That's not very nice, now is it? I haven't even started on you yet!"

Xu Ping decided to skip the talk and dived for the book.

"Oi! Oi! What're you doing?! You're gonna tear it! Hey!"

Xu Ping was flipping through the new book of Heroes of Sui and Tang on the curb when He Zhi asked, "So what's up with you and Lu Jia?"

Xu Ping scoffed without even glancing up. "Just don't like him. That's what's up."

"Well, there must be a reason why you don't. I think he's alright, though."

Xu Ping didn't reply.

"Lu Jia said you beat his brother."

"Yeah, I did." Xu Ping turned the page as he read intently.

He Zhi looked over at him. "Isn't his brother only in year two?"

"Yup, Lu Xi, year two division one, sweet talker that everyone loves. He gets so much money during New Year's he probably gets sprains from counting it."

He Zhi didn't say anything but his expression clearly said: "How could you do that to a second grader!"

Xu Ping's eyes were on the page but he was thinking: "Goddamn, I went easy on him. Should've just beaten him to death!"

Xu Ping had seen Lu Xi throwing dirt on Xu Zheng behind the others' backs. Xu Zheng was dumb and slow to react. Lu Xi then began giggling, holding his stomach laughing. After he finished laughing, he pushed the boy to the ground, shouting, "Retard!"

Xu Ping was standing in the shadows on the second floor balcony. The word "retard" seemed to poke holes into him like a knife.

Xu Ping didn't bother to explain to He Zhi. He couldn't either, since the other boy was the youngest in his family, the one who was babied.

Xu Ping stuffed the book into his own bag and dusted his butt while standing up. "Alright. I'd better head home now."

He Zhi grabbed him. "My book!"

"I'm confiscating it because you've been misbehaving."

"What do you mean misbehaving?" He Zhi shouted. "I haven't even read a single page yet!"

Xu Ping remembered his promise to buy a popsicle for Xu Zheng and went over to the bicycle with a makeshift cooler in the back made from a wooden box and cotton cloth.

"I'll give it back tomorrow."

He Zhi considered it for a moment before negotiating, "Alright, if you buy me a popsicle."

"Buy it yourself." Xu Ping shrugged him off.

"With what? I spent it all on the book!" He said as he pulled out his pockets which were indeed empty.

Xu Ping replied as he rummaged for his cash. "Ask your sister for more."

"She just got a job," he explained sadly, "Thirty bucks a month. It's not even enough for herself. Asking her for money would be like committing suicide."

Xu Ping handed over a one yuan bill. "Two cream, please."

"Wow." He Zhi's eyes popped out. "You're rich, Ping-zi!"

"My dad went to Qinghai to perform. This is for when he's away." Xu Ping reached for the change and the two popsicles wrapped in green paper.

He Zhi's eyes were glued to them like a poor dog looking at its favourite bone. "That's so awesome. My dad never gives me allowance."

Xu Ping gave in. "Alright, fine. What flavour do you like?"

“Cream!” He Zhi exclaimed with a jump.

Xu Ping handed another five cents. “Mister, be sure to give him chocolate.”

“Cool,” He Zhi laughed, “I like chocolate more.”

Damn it. Xu Ping realised he fell right into the taller boy’s trap!



Tea eggs, without shell



An elementary school in Wuhan, China, during their morning assembly

For more information:

[Tea eggs](#)

[Red scarf](#)

ayszhang: Chapter threeeee. Not much to say so far since the story has just started ;) Next chapter is kind of intense though hehe

[Two](#)

[Four](#)



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4

Translator: ayszhang

Proofreaders: happyBuddha, m@o



Chapter 4 of [Brother!](#)!

Four

ONE CHILD PER COUPLE. QUALITY OVER QUANTITY FOR MODERNIZATION.

Xu Ping walked past the huge black letters on the bulletin board by the street while sucking on a popsicle. He was getting a brain freeze.

The sky had gotten darker, no longer a clear blue but a warm, fiery orange that burned the horizons.

People were heading home from work on their bicycles. Greetings were shouted and small talk quickly exchanged when two people saw a familiar face before their vehicles wheeled them apart again.

The blue and white coloured number four tram called “The Advancing Youth” came to a loud stop by the platform. The ticket lady poked her head out of the window and announced the next stop. Soon, passengers filled up the tram, and

the doors slammed shut before the vehicle chugged along its path.

Xu Ping threw the remaining stick into the trash basket of a restaurant and took a big breath.

The mouth-watering smell of stir-fry was wafting in the air, entering his nostrils like magic.

He could almost hear his stomach rumbling.

Xu Zheng was probably done with playing with sand by now. He had better hurry back or else the popsicle was going to melt.

He ran for the courtyard with the cream popsicle in hand only to bump right into Mr. Zhang, his dad's colleague. The man had black, square glasses and a white Dacron short sleeve shirt with a pen clipped on the breast pocket. He was parking his bicycle in the garage.

"Hello, Mr. Zhang."

"Oh, Xu Ping, you're out late. Where did you go?"

"I went to buy a popsicle for my brother." Xu Ping held it up accordingly.

Mr. Zhang didn't ask for more details and grabbed his black briefcase from the basket on the bicycle. "Come over later for dinner with Xu Zheng. Mrs. Zhang is making tofu tonight."

"Yes, sir." Xu Ping replied before racing off.

The sun had dropped below the horizon leaving only a dying glow.

Xu Ping stood by the deserted sandbox and scanned around.

Not a soul in sight.

He could hear the sound of frying pans and television. The seven o'clock news was going to start after the familiar melody.

"Xiaooooo! Zhenggggg!"

Xu Ping's voice echoed out only to disappear like the ripples in a pond after a pebble falls in.

The popsicle had melted and was dribbling down the stick and onto his hand.

There were thirty neat piles of sand in the sandbox beside which there was Xu Zheng's red bucket, turned over.

Xu Ping threw the popsicle away and turned the bucket right side up.

Out fell half a piece of essay paper with a few scribbled words on it. Xu Ping read it in the dim twilight.

Xu Ping, come to the Informatics Centre!

That retard! I told him not to run off with strangers!

Xu Ping cursed in his head as he ran to the abandoned building.

God damn! What else is that brat good for other than causing trouble!

Xu Ping was writhing with annoyance but picked up his speed nonetheless.

The rubber soles of his canvas shoes slapped against the ground.

A tiny voice was saying inside:

You were the one who left your brother to read comics.

Xu Ping tripped and fell. His backpack flew a distance away and his palms were scraped bloody by the sand on the ground.

Ow! That hurt!

Xu Ping pushed himself back up, hissing in pain.

It's not my fault! I told him, and he said he heard me!

But...

If he's so stupid that he'll run off with anyone, he might as well just get kidnapped!

The voice inside slowly died down, not to be heard from again.

The sky got darker and darker. A slice of the moon and a few stars could be seen on the navy blue backdrop.

Mr. Zhang was going to come out looking for them if he didn't go over soon with Xu Zheng.

With that in mind, Xu Ping sprung to his feet and sprinted for the worn-down red brick building, not even bothering to pick up his backpack.

Xu Ping never really figured out what kind of information the Informatics Centre researched exactly.

The kids had often debated on this issue regarding the mysterious building that didn't even have an address. In the end, they were swaying between invading Taiwan and defeating the Americans.

It was a time when every boy had an army green beret with a five-pointed star on his head and a red flag in hand. Even his blood seemed to broil with passion.

Xu Ping wasn't missing that burning passion, but he had to take care of that troublesome brother of his every day. What he was missing was the free time to play with friends and hope for a brighter tomorrow with that red flag in hand.

He entered the Informatics Centre. The China rose in the planter box had long dried out from a lack of care, leaving only dead, brown stems still standing.

There was broken glass everywhere, and every window he could see had a huge hole in it, from which the evening wind howled.

He heard Xu Zheng's cry coming from one of the rooms, followed by boys' snickering and talking.

"Hey, hurry up. The idiot keeps movin'. I can barely hold him down."

"Shut up! I took this Seagull from my dad. He'd skin me alive if anything happened to it!"

"Just hurry up and take it."

Xu Ping sped after the sound.

"Okay. Do a pose."

"Make me look cool, eh." Then he added, "I want it to look like The Heroes of Sui and Tang."

"Alright, I got it. Don't just stand there."

The green paint was peeling off from the half-opened door. Xu Ping saw Xu

Zheng being totally subdued by Lu Jia from behind. The light was behind them and he couldn't see their faces well.

What the hell do they want? Xu Ping wondered. They want me to watch them take pictures of Xu Zheng?

Xu Ping was a bit confused.

He wanted to call out.

"Xiao-Zheng, big brother's here.

"I told you not to run off with strangers!"

"Xiao-Zheng, time to go home for supper!"

From a place he couldn't see, a boy jumped out and kicked Xu Zheng in the face.

Time seemed to have stopped.

He saw his brother's tiny body fly out like a kite that was cut loose. The red tank top and pale blue shorts. The hands and feet as white and soft as snow.

Xu Zheng, the most annoying, most hated brother in the world.

Xu Zheng fell to the ground.

Xu Zheng was the reason why he couldn't participate in extracurricular activities, why he had lied to his teacher and classmates, ruining the fieldtrips every year.

Xu Zheng's body jerked a little in efforts to get up, but he failed to do so.

"Yo, how was that? Just like [Li Yuanba](#), right? 'Cept for the two clubs."

Xu Zheng would only bother him. He needed to be fed his food, accompanied to sleep and even scrubbed in the shower.

Xu Zheng moved again, propping his elbows up in efforts to get up, but he fell right back down again.

"Did you get it?"

"I think so."

He was eight years old but was still so stupid that he couldn't learn anything. He had been sent home by the elementary school teacher not even half a term in. "We can't teach a child like this." Then, everybody knew – the teachers, the students – the news spread quicker than the wind! "Hey, did you hear? Xu Ping's brother is a retard."

Xu Zheng finally managed to sit up. His face was swollen and still had the dirt from the bottom of the boy's shoe.

"What do you mean, you think so?"

"You did it so fast. I don't know if the camera caught it or not."

"Then, let's do it again. You'd better get it this time."

"Got it."

This retard had a temper tantrum because Xu Ping was late but would only stand there like a dummy when he was truly being bullied. He was clearly in pain. Why didn't he cry? Why did he not cry?!

Xu Zheng sat on the ground, still, as blood oozed out from a cut on his calf. He faced the window, listening for a while, before suddenly speaking. "Seven o'clock. I have to go home."

Lu Jia dragged him up from the ground.

"Zhao Bo, you hold him down real good."

"But my photo...."

"It's my turn now."

Xu Zheng was the most annoying, most hated brother in the world.

Xu Ping thought as he picked up a broken table leg from the ground, eyes red, teeth clenched.



A model of Seagull camera



A live-action portrayal of Li Yuanba

ayszhang: Sorry for those who were waiting for Endless Rain. Ying is busy with university applications and haven't found time to translate the next chapter. I will post the date once she has actually completed the translation.

[Three](#)

[Five](#)



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5

Translator: ayszhang

Proofreaders: happyBuddha, m@o



Surprise! Ch 5 of [Brother!](#)

Five

I ain't going no[where]...If I want to die, I'll die right here.

—Muhammed Ali in *Ali* (2001)

Thump!

“Get up!

“Didn’t you want to beat me up just now? What’s wrong, you wimp? Can’t take a few punches?

“Zhao Bo, pick this fucker up!

“You think I’d be scared of you and your little stick? In your fuckin’ dreams!

“Oh, what? You’re mute now? Cat’s got your tongue? I thought you’re so

clever with your mouth, tellin' on me to the teacher, sayin' I'm always late and copying homework. It was you, wasn't it! Say it! C'mon!

"You hit my brother, didn't you?!"

"Not talkin'? Zhao Bo, Liu Wan, you hold him real good for me!"

"He's only in year two, five years younger than you! You should pick on someone your own size! You think you're a tough guy, yeah? Alright, let's see what you can do!"

"You think you can touch my little brother? You can't afford to get him hurt! What, you think your retard brother is better?"

"Zhao Bo, get me a brick."

"Alright, Lu Jia. You beat 'im good enough. Just look at 'im."

"Good enough? He didn't think so when he was beatin' up my brother!"

"You might kill him at this rate."

"Yeah, and there's a bleeding hole in my head where he hit me with that stick."

"Just watch it, okay...."

"Better that he dies! His mom's half a retard, and his dad wasn't clean either. That's why they got married, and their kid, Xu Zheng, turned out a retard, too!"

"Really?"

"My mom said so, that's what everyone at work says! Retard is in the genes! So when Xu Ping gets married, his son's gonna be just like his brother, all retards!"

"But Xu Ping looks pretty normal, though?"

"How should I know? His mom was stupid but really pretty. His dad's a good-looking man, too. And Xu Ping doesn't look like either of them."

"What if he's adopted?"

"Yeah, maybe! He knew he'd have a retard kid, so he picked up a normal brother to take care of the retard. See, Xu Ping plays at the sandbox with him

every single damn day. He's better than a [child bride](#)!"

"Hahaha...."

"Alright, let's go. Hurts my eyes just lookin' at these two fucking piles of shit!"

Xu Ping lay on the ground in silence.

Blood dripped out from the crack in his head only to dry before reaching the ground.

The sky had completely blackened now. The stars were like streetlights of the night, faint silver bulbs in the dark blue sky.

It was late summer, early autumn. The bugs were having the last party of the year because once the first frost came to the city they would soon die and return to the earth as dirt.

Xu Ping did not bat an eyelash.

He couldn't recall the last time he had the liberty of lying on a dusty floor. Was it when he was four? Or three?

The memories of childhood had become hazy, and even the face of his dead mom was blurry beyond recognition.

Dad, Xu Zheng, and himself were the only ones left.

The older he got, the more invisible restrictions were put on him. It was as though he was growing inside a box, year after year. Soon, his body had become square as well.

He could not roll around on the floor. He could not use his hands to eat. He could not whine, be cheeky or be scared of pain.

Dad was good to him but that "good" was different from the "good" that Xu Zheng got.

Even Xu Ping was shocked and envious of the unconditional affection that showed through his dad's eyes.

No matter how hard he tried – he got full marks on the exam, he got praise for his essay or he was the flag raiser on Monday – his dad would reply with a nod

and maybe sometimes “keep it up.” However, when Xu Zheng accomplished any tiny, insignificant thing, for instance, tying his shoes, his dad would shower him with hugs and kisses and rejoice as though he wanted to open the door and shout to the world: “My son knows how to tie his laces!”

Feeling that it was unfair, Xu Ping intentionally left his examination blank to get his dad’s attention, but all he got was: “You’ve grown up, Xu Ping.”

The moment his dad turned away, Xu Ping held the blank test paper with a bright red circle on it and broke out in silent sobs from the overwhelming shame, grievance and anger.

Not offering a word of comfort, his dad barked at him with his back turned, “Watch your behaviour! Don’t forget, you’re the older brother!”

Xu Ping wiggled his arms and legs.

Pain shot through his body. His limbs felt detached like a broken chair, creaking and moaning with every movement.

He let out a soft hiss.

A small figure crawled out from the corner and shuffled over to him.

“Seven o’clock. Supper time.”

Xu Ping didn’t speak.

Xu Zheng repeated after a pause. “Gege, seven o’clock, supper time!”

“Go eat yourself.”

Xu Zheng shouted as though he had not heard. “Gege, supper!”

Xu Ping lay there, motionless.

Xu Zheng shouted again and reached out for him.

Xu Ping shoved him away, yelling, “I told you to go back yourself! Did you not hear me?!”

Xu Zheng fell onto his butt and sat there staring at Xu Ping.

It suddenly became really quiet. The silver moonlight poured into the

abandoned building from the broken windows. The bugs were chirping from some bushes outside.

Xu Ping bore with the pain as he propped himself up with the wall.

He mumbled to himself mockingly, “Hah, how did I forget you’re a retard? How would a retard know the way?!”

Xu Zheng stared at his brother with his big, round eyes.

The wound on his leg cracked open again, out from which trickled faint traces of blood.

He fumbled to get up and followed his brother out.

Out the green door, through the hallway painted greyish blue on either side, down the concrete stairs while holding onto the cracked wooden railing, one step, two step, three....

Xu Ping knew his brother was behind him without having to look back.

As they passed one streetlight after another, their shadows lengthened and shortened and at times crisscrossed.

He could see the lights from the residence of the Cultural Troupe.

Xu Ping stopped and said tiredly, “Okay, you know the way from here. Go home.”

“Gege, supper.”

“You’ll get supper when you go back.”

“Gege, supper.”

“How many times do I have to make myself clear?! If you’re hungry, you go back! Go back and eat your fucking supper!” Xu Ping screamed.

Xu Zheng stayed quiet for a moment before speaking again, “Gege, seven o’clock—”

But this time, Xu Ping interrupted him before he could finish.

“I’m not your brother!”

Xu Zheng faltered, possibly because he didn't understand the meaning of this.

"Gege—"

"Don't call me that!" Xu Ping growled through clenched teeth. "I'm normal! I don't have a retard for a brother!"

Xu Zheng stood there.

"How would you even understand? All you do every day is eat, sleep and play with your sand. You're just an alien! Alien! An alien who doesn't know anything! Do you know what it means to live?! Do you know pain?!"

Xu Ping swung his arm back and slapped Xu Zheng across the face. Xu Zheng held his arm up in defense.

"Why don't you fight back when they hit you?! Fight back! Hit me back! Beat me up!"

"Ge—"

"Don't call me that! I hate you! I hate you!"

He punched and kicked his brother while tears streamed down his face as though he were in deep sorrow. Soon his brother's face was covered with red handprints. Together with the other half swollen from earlier, he was a terrible mess.

"Cry! Why won't you cry! Why don't you ever cry? You weren't even sad when mom died. You monster! You heartless monster!"

"It's all your fault. Everything. All of it. If it weren't for you... If it weren't for you—"

He couldn't finish.

Xu Zheng was hurting so badly that he pushed Xu Ping away, causing the latter to trip over a rock and tip backwards.

The hole in his head opened wider and blood kept dribbling down his face.

Both of the boys were taken back.

Xu Zheng took a step forward and called softly, "Gege."

Xu Ping was very dizzy and his breathing hastened.

He pushed his brother's hand away as the blood and tears melted together on his face.

"Just go die. I don't ever want to see you again."

More information on the Chinese concept of "cleanliness"

There is a similar concept in North Korea ([songbun](#)).

This was a system reinforced by Mao Zedong to return equality to the proletarians by branding those who had wealth or owned private land. Private land was seized and made state-owned, their owners labelled "dirty," essentially anti-communist. Farmers, or proletarians, were encouraged and allowed to verbally and physically abuse those branded as "dirty", resulting in countless executions and suicides due to the social pressure. Later, this label was forced to be passed on to the family of those "dirty" citizens and written on their identification. Those who were discovered to hide their "dirty" connections were treated even more badly.

During these decades, there was an internal war between the different classes that caused much strife for the country. Almost comparable to the Jews during WWII, those who reported the secret "dirty" roots of others to the Party would be promoted or have an extra star on their file, per se. I've personally heard stories of husbands and wives betraying each other to stay safe.

This term is still used today for those who wish to be in the Communist Party (which still brings about many benefits in the Chinese society today). One must be "clean" in order to become a party member and stay "clean" to stay a member. However, the country is slowly adopting capitalist ideas, allowing private-owned property and such, and this "cleanliness" is not so much an issue unless you wish to pursue a career whose industry is still controlled by the state (all forms of media, politics, army, academia...).

ayszhang: surprise post :D The progress for this story is much faster (chapter-

wise) since they are shorter and easier to translate...so expect more of these surprises!

Four

Six



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6

Translator: ayszhang

Proofreaders: m@o



Chapter 6 of [Brother](#)!

Six

Run, Forrest! Run!

—Forrest Gump in *Forrest Gump* (1994)

The first toy that Xu Ping had was a light beige cardboard kaleidoscope.

You put the lens up to your eye and twist the other end while facing the sun, and the dark blue patterns would keep transforming.

You might like this combination or hate that one, but you will find one for you as long as you are patient.

The most important thing, though, is that your favourite pattern won't stop

and wait for you. Every time you put it down, the shapes would go into hiding like a naughty child, so you can enjoy the fun of searching again.

But even this toy that seemed to be complex was nothing but a tube, mirrors and a piece of colourful paper.

The young Xu Ping had been extremely disappointed. He had thought that he would find countless pieces of patterned paper and he just had to pick out his favourite one, save it and never worry about searching again.

The mirror broke when he took the kaleidoscope apart. He could no longer see those beautiful shapes no matter how hard he tried to put it back together.

Xu Ping moped for a bit before tossing the kaleidoscope to the back of his mind.

A lot happened afterwards. His brother was born. His mother died. He entered elementary school. His brother also entered elementary school. His brother got kicked out. His dad almost got married with a woman named Li but the matter wasn't heard of ever again....

Xu Ping had thought he would never think of the kaleidoscope again. As he was carried into the hospital by Mr. Zhang late at night, he saw the blue mosaic floor tiles rotate under the white light in his feverish state.

"Ka...Kaleidoscope..."

"What?!" Mr. Zhang was breaking out in cold sweat. "It'll be over soon, Xu Ping. You're a brave boy. Just hold on and the doctors and nurses will treat your wound. Just hang in there. Just a little longer."

He mumbled as he hugged the man's neck, "I want the kaleidoscope...."

"Okay, okay, okay, I'll buy you a kaleidoscope when you get better!" Mr. Zhang was looking for the emergency room with Xu Ping in his arms. "You're a good boy, Xu Ping, you're a brave warrior. We're at the hospital now so just hang in there."

Xu Ping was very happy. Really, really happy.

It had been so long since someone granted his wishes unconditionally.

It had been so long since someone told him that he was a brave warrior, that

he was a good kid.

He held onto this man's neck tightly. The strong, warm embrace gave him relief. He didn't have to be afraid anymore. No one could hurt him anymore.

He rested his head on the man's shoulder. The patterns on the floor kept morphing like a thousand blue blooming flowers.

He couldn't remember anything. It was as though he had turned into a baby again. Dad was listening to the radio in the living room. Mom was steaming white fluffy buns in the kitchen. He was lying on the chair by the balcony, twisting his favourite toy with it pointed at the sun. Xu Ping closed his eyes and mewled, "Dad...."

His reply was the gentle pat of a large hand on his back.

Xu Ping got seven stitches for his head injury. Half of his head was shaved clean for the CT scan, and results came back saying his skull was fine. He still got a shot for tetanus just in case.

Xu Ping had long fallen asleep when he was being bandaged up.

He had many strange dreams. All he saw were bits and pieces that he forgot by the time his eyes blinked open.

The first thing he saw when he woke up was Mr. Zhang nodding off in a chair by the cot. His glasses were hanging on the tip of his nose. His white shirt was all wrinkled.

The sky was hazy with the morning glow and there was still some bluish fog hanging in the air.

Xu Ping lay on the bed for long minutes.

Pain seemed to tug at his head and his brain refused to function like a machine missing its gears.

He sat up carefully and shook Mr. Zhang's arm.

"Why am I here?"

Zhang Jinmin woke up too and answered while rubbing his sore neck. "Do you

remember, I took you here last night to get stitches?"

Xu Ping had already gone back into his protective shell; he was no longer that child who screamed for his toys.

"Thank you, Mr. Zhang," he said very politely.

Zhang Jinmin faltered before patting the side of Xu Ping's head that still had hair. "Child, don't act like such an adult!"

It took Xu Ping five seconds to react.

Was he talking about me? He thought, but I'm not a child anymore.

"Where's my brother?"

Zhang Jinmin replied honestly stiffening. "I didn't see him but I asked Mrs. Zhang to go look for him before I left. He's just a kid, he couldn't have gotten far. He's probably home sleeping now."

Xu Ping had always respected Mr. Zhang because he was first of all a good man. If not, Xu Ping's dad wouldn't have left him and Xu Zheng in his hands. Second of all, he was an honest man. Many good people were also good liars, but not Mr. Zhang. Every word he said to the elementary school student before him was truth. He spoke to Xu Ping as an equal and Xu Ping appreciated this greatly.

Eventually, Xu Ping grew easy.

He knew Xu Zheng, an idiot who didn't like to wander around. No need to worry.

He pulled the sheets back and hopped off the bed.

A new day had begun.

With his head wrapped in white bandages like a casualty coming back from the battlefield, Xu Ping followed Mr. Zhang back to his home.

The half-bald look was just too silly. He was considering to shave it all off and wear a hat.

He didn't even write a word for the assignment yesterday, and he didn't know

where his backpack was, either.

The worst thing, though, with going to school was that he would have to see Lu Jia every day.

All these worries and frustrations made his head hurt.

However, these were further down the road. There was a more urgent question at hand.

Xu Zheng.

Xu Ping had disappeared for the entire night after beating him up and telling him to go die. Now that he was calm, he deeply regretted saying such reckless things.

But a bit of wishful thinking was mixed in with the regret. That retard probably didn't even know what his words meant.

As he contemplated, he braced himself before walking into Mr. Zhang's home.

There was a round table in the living room. Mr. Zhang's spouse was setting the table for breakfast for their first grader daughter, Zhang Xiaojuan.

Zhang Jinmin scanned the room before asking his wife, He Mei, "Hey, where's Xu Zheng?"

He Mei placed a bowl of rice congee on the table without replying.

When Zhang Jinmin asked again, she slapped the chopsticks onto the table. "I don't know!"

Zhang Jinmin asked after her answer sunk in. "You don't know if the boy's here or not?"

"You're asking me? Where did you go all night?!"

"I thought I told you when I left. Xu Ping hurt his head and needed to go to the emergency—"

"And taking him to the emergency took the whole night?!"

Zhang Jinmin was fired up too. "The kid needed stitches and scans. Lao-Xu left him in my hands, how could I just leave him and come home?!"

He Mei began to shriek. “Oh, you *do* know he’s *Lao-Xu*’s kid! What about your own kid?! Juanjuan had diarrhea all night and all she wanted was her dad. I didn’t have anyone to help me get her to the hospital. Where were you then?!”

Zhang Jinmin glanced at the spooked girl eating her congee. “Don’t yell in front of the kids. Come into the room with me!”

The two closed the bedroom door behind them.

The man’s voice wasn’t distinguishable, but the woman’s was sharp and pierced through the door.

“Alright?! Does she look alright to you?! She had diarrhea all night, her face is paler than a ghost!”

“*Lao-Xu* this, *Lao-Xu* that! You don’t owe him shit to be raising his sons for him!”

“Yeah, you’re the good guy! And I’m the evil villain! You’re such a good guy you forget about your own family and go raise someone else’s kids! Do you care about Juanjuan? Do you care about me? Do you even care about this family?”

“Oh, *Lao-Xu* has it hard? Yes! But who doesn’t have it hard?! I can cook a meal for him, but I can’t cook for him every day! I can’t father his children for him!”

“Xu Zheng ran away.”

“How should I know where that idiot went? Juanjuan had diarrhea. Was I supposed to leave my own daughter and go looking for his son?! I went out looking once and he should be grateful!”

“What do I have to explain to *Lao-Xu*? He’s the one who’s always running off to some place instead of taking care of his kids. I’m here worrying he’s gonna leave for good and leave those boys to me!”

“What did you just say, Zhang Jinmin?! You say that again! Don’t think I don’t know about your dirty little secrets! I know what you’re hiding in that book of yours! Take it out, I dare you! You disgusting—”

The woman’s voice was stopped by a blunt sound.

After seconds of silence, the room turned into a popcorn pot as screams and sounds of things falling and shattering bounced off the walls.

“Go tell the Party you want a divorce! Go! I dare you!”

Xu Ping managed to get up on his shaky legs.

He said in a bare whisper to Zhang Xiaojuan sitting to his side, “Tell your dad I’m going to look for my brother.”

The frightened little girl nodded with wide-eyes.

ayszhang: Just a hint for those who didn't get it, Mr. Zhang has stuck something between the pages of a book. My interpretation is that it's a photograph of Xu Ping's father whom Mr. Zhang has a secret love for, which is why He Mei calls him "disgusting." I guess she was going to say something like "you disgusting fag."

[Five](#)

[Seven](#)



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Translator: ayszhang

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Surprise! Chapter 7 of [Brother!](#)

Seven

What is important is always invisible.

—Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *The Little Prince*

Xu Ping didn't go to school.

He first went home. He stood at the entrance after he opened the door. For some reason, he was scared and his knees were weak.

Only after encouraging himself silently did he step inside.

The red bucket wasn't under the table. Xu Zheng had always put his favourite toy there, but today it wasn't anywhere in the room.

Xu Ping was standing in the smack middle of the living room. Every door in the

house was wide open. The window in the boys' room was opened and the light beige curtains were flapping loudly from the wind rushing in through the crack.

It was obvious that his brother wasn't home but he still called, "Xiao-Zheng!"

No one answered.

He stayed in the spot for a moment and then went to the kitchen. He took a glass out from the cabinet, poured himself a full glass and gulped it all down.

He was really thirsty.

He poured another glass. Halfway through, he felt sick and started dry barfing in the sink, but nothing came out.

He dumped the rest of the water and placed the glass back after washing it.

It was really quiet.

Xu Zheng never liked to talk but would make all sorts of noises. He was clumsy and would often bump into the table, making thumps and clunks, but never had

Xu Ping heard him say ouch.

Xu Ping had to check on him every now and then as he did homework in the bedroom. At first, he would put down his pencil and go looking. Later, he simply called his brother's name from his seat and Xu Zheng would pop into the room quietly. Regardless if Xu Zheng was in the middle of something or how many times he had been called already, he would show up obediently as soon as his brother called his name, like a dog responding to its owner's command.

Sometimes when Xu Ping was bullied at school, he would keep calling Xu Zheng's name to feel better. As soon as Xu Zheng showed up, he would get him to go away again. Even after Xu Zheng ran back and forth dozens of time between the living room and the bedroom and his forehead was glistening with sweat, he would still behave well, without complaint, like a dumb, loyal dog.

And it was also this dumb doggy who threw a temper tantrum at Xu Ping for being late.

Xu Ping had to admit that he had no idea what was going on inside Xu Zheng's head.

He always thought his brother was a retard who was slow to react and lacked

emotions. Therefore, he never considered his own words and actions before doing them. He had not only beaten him up but also told him to go die.

Perhaps in reality, he was the asshole who had been bullying Xu Zheng this whole time.

Eyes red on the verge of tears, Xu Ping slapped himself across the face.

He was going to go out looking. He was going to find Xu Zheng and bring him home. He was going to apologize to him properly.

Even though Xu Zheng was a retard, he was his dear brother, his only one.

He grabbed his keys and locked the door on his way out.

The sun is white.

This thought popped into Xu Ping's mind for some reason.

During his short elementary career, Xu Zheng had drawn one picture. The art teacher had assigned a theme like "Under the sky" or "A beautiful day" or something. Almost every other kid in the class drew a bright red sun in the top right corner, and under it were trees and flowers and a house and a road. A stickman family stood on the lawn holding hands.

Xu Zheng's drawing only consisted of a blank circle that took up two-thirds of the page while the rest of the paper was coloured blue. It looked like the Kuomintang flag.

Xu Ping was delivering homework to the staff room when the art teacher was yelling at Xu Zheng, slapping the drawing onto the table.

"What the hell is this?!"

Xu Zheng answered, "The sun. It is white."

Xu Zheng got zero on the art assignment, and the teacher demanded a redo.

Xu Zheng, being the retard he was, refused to redraw it. In the end, his big brother had to do it for him.

As Xu Ping worked, he scolded Zu Zheng. "Why are you so stupid?! What's so hard about drawing a tree or a mountain? Why did I have to end up with a retard

like you?!"

Xu Zheng contemplated for a while before replying, "No mountain. The sun is enough."

Xu Ping took this as evidence for his brother's retardation and remembered it very well.

On the way to the courtyard, the sun burned the skin on his arms.

The science teacher warned them not to be fooled by the colour of flames – the hotter the flame, the lighter the colour. When you turned on the gas stove, the tip of the flame was red and the lower parts slowly turned to a cool blue. There was also a kind of flame that was invisible – its light so strong that humans cannot look at it with the naked eye. White flame was the hottest of flames.

What colour is the sun?

The entire courtyard was empty. The red bucket lay forgotten by the sandbox.

The buildings in the complex were quiet too. Everyone had gone to work or school.

Xu Ping cupped his hands together in front of his mouth and shouted his brother's name through it over and over again.

His voice echoed back after hitting the buildings, sounding like a million Xu Pings all calling out to *Xiao-Zheng*.

Who of course did not answer.

Sweat soaked through Xu Ping's bandages and dripped down his face.

Have you ever lost something important?

Xu Ping meticulously searched through the courtyard three times but found no brother.

He even went to the school for the special and the teacher asked him first, "Why didn't Xu Zheng come today?"

Xu Ping wanted to say his brother was missing but couldn't get the words out

of his mouth. He ended up lying, saying that Xu Zheng was sick.

The teacher was a kind person and told Xu Ping, "Make sure he gets good rest." Then, she expressed concern for Xu Ping, too. "What happened to your head? It's all wrapped up."

"I tripped and fell," Xu Ping said before running off in a hurry.

He kept searching until the afternoon until he was exhausted and starving. The wound on his head seemed to have opened again and it hurt as if someone was hammering a nail into his head.

He thought he would go home for some water and food before going back to searching again. Maybe Xu Zheng would already be home when he went back?

He dragged his legs up the stairs and when he pushed on the door, it swung open.

Xu Ping shouted with delight, "*Xiao-Zheng!*"

The air in the living room was filled with smoke. Mr. Zhang was sitting in a chair, smoking with his head down and cigarette butts piled around him.

"How did you get in?!" Xu Ping exclaimed.

Xu Ping's appearance made Zhang Jinmin falter before he quickly squished the cigarette out. "Xu Zheng left his keys at our house so I used it. Where did you go?"

Xu Ping didn't speak.

Zhang Jinmin followed the boy's gaze to the cigarette butts on the ground and said embarrassingly, "Sorry, I didn't even realize I'd made a mess." He opened the windows to let in the fresh air and then went looking for the broom and dustpan.

Even after the ashes and cigarettes had been dealt with, Xu Ping was still standing there, not having said a word.

Even Zhang Jinmin felt awkward, but he was an adult nonetheless.

"You just had stitches, don't go running around."

The stubborn Xu Ping lowered his head.

"I'm sorry I lost your brother."

Xu Ping's head was racing with thoughts. He had always respected Mr. Zhang and thought he was a good man, but even good men had their problems.

He finally spoke, "It's fine, sir. You can go back home."

For the first time in his life, Zhang Jinmin began to feel bad in front of a child.

This morning, he had a fight with his wife and was feeling frustrated beyond description. He left He Mei sobbing in the bedroom, and when he came out to the living room, Xu Ping had already left.

His wife said a bunch of hurtful things in her mad state, and even he, an adult, couldn't take it. He wondered how much Xu Ping had heard.

"Um.... Was it something you heard, Xu Ping? You know Mrs. Zhang is tough on the outside but she means well...."

"I understand." Xu Ping interrupted. "My mom died, Xu Zheng is an idiot and my dad's always away for work. We've always depended on you all these years and I feel very grateful. I'm young now, but when I get older, I will repay you."

These words made Zhang Jinmin shake with fury. He slapped the table out of anger. "When did I ask for you to repay me?!" he barked, "Who do you think I am? How dare you, Xu Ping?!"

Xu Ping was confused and wondered what he did wrong.

He was only twelve and didn't understand the secrets of adults.

Mrs. Zhang's insults were aimed for Mr. Zhang but every word of it struck him in the heart.

He had also wanted to cry and scream and throw a tantrum, but when he took a look around, he realized it wasn't his home.

No matter how good Mr. Zhang was, he was not his dad.

Xu Ping reached an answer.

Xu Chuan could beat him, scold him, raise him and feed him. Whatever he did, Xu Ping had to take it. Xu Chuan was his real father and was responsible for him. The other people were all outsiders. Their occasional kindness was extra and

undeserved, and was a debt he would have to return for the rest of his life.

Xu Ping was speaking his true feelings when he had said he would repay Mr. Zhang.

He didn't understand why the man was so angry so he just tucked his head in and refused to make another sound.

The frustrated Mr. Zhang reached into his pocket for another smoke only to find a flat box.

He scoffed at himself for acting up. No matter how mature Xu Ping seemed, he was only twelve years old and didn't know anything yet.

He treated the Xu brothers so well partly because of that unspeakable secret and partly because he was a kind man. No matter which one, he couldn't let Xu Ping treat his affection like a deal.

He did his best to suppress his rage. "Did you find your brother?"

Xu Ping shook his head. His eyes immediately turned red, but he held it in, his facial muscle taut like a string about to snap.

Seeing the boy like this, Zhang Jinmin couldn't find it in himself to stay mad. He stood up and said to the boy, "You haven't eaten, have you? I'll make some noodles for you and we'll go looking for Xu Zheng after."

Xu Zheng still had not come back by the end of that long day.

Xu Ping had always thought that his brother was an idiot, but it was this idiot who had done something incredible.

He searched everywhere Xu Zheng might have hid – the garbage dump, the boiler room, the bushes out back, inside the cement cylinders – while calling his brother's name, but Xu Zheng was nowhere to be found.

The last place he went to was the abandoned Informatics Centre.

It was sunset again and the *ding-a-ling* of bicycles rang through streets and alleys.

The sky was still light and the part right above the horizon was dyed bloody. The past twenty-four hours had seemed to last a century. When Xu Ping stood once again before the dead China roses and shattered glass, he had the ridiculous feeling that everything had changed.

He had thought he was bearing the most pain a person could take, but after all this, he discovered that his life had only just started.

He went around the courtyard twice before climbing the stairs up. Every door that he opened only brought him disappointment.

The last room was in a corner by the stairwell on the fifth floor. The narrow white door fell in the shadows and was so dusty the white appeared grey.

It was Xu Ping's last hope.

He stood outside the door, holding the doorknob in prayer – if Xu Zheng was inside, and if he would forgive him, he would gladly do whatever in exchange even if it meant getting beat up by Lu Jia every day.

After making this wish, Xu Ping took a deep breath and pushed open the door.

The room was very dark. There was only one window the size of a workbook that was completely clouded by dust.

All sorts of things lay on the floor. Broken chairs and desks, old newspaper and used cardboard boxes piled together to form a mess.

A [poster](#) hung crooked on one wall.

ABOLISH ??? (torn off), ALL HAIL THE PROLETARIAT CULTURAL REVOLUTION!

Xu Zheng was not there.

Xu Ping closed the door while the tiny voice inside repeated: he's gone, your brother's gone....

Behind the stairwell was a metal ladder that led straight to the rooftop. Xu Ping climbed up and pushed open the metal door.

The evening breeze brushed his face. The city was bathed in the vermillion sunset. He could see into the distance, past his home. There were the long railroad tracks, the factory chimneys pumping out white smoke, the old

traditional building made of grey bricks and the countless power lines and poles connecting the city in a huge spider web.

In this place, so many lived like ants, being born, growing up, attending school, finding a job, going to work, getting married, having kids, growing old....

Their sadness, their joy, their encounters and their farewells were here; their love, their hate, their insanity and their rage were here. Their lives were here, and so were their deaths.

His brother was probably somewhere down below. Xu Ping just couldn't find him.

He shouted towards the city and the setting sun, "Xu Zheng, you bastard!
Come out right now!"

Only the wind replied as it blew over the railing.

Xu Ping had never been so afraid and desperate.

He had lost his brother.

At last, he hid his head between his arms and began to bawl.



The Taiwanese jack

For more information:

[Dazibao/propaganda poster](#)

[The Cultural Revolution](#) (an experiment by the Communist Party that left the country in shambles; this sets the background for this story)

ayszhang: Another surprise! This time it's in celebration of the Lunar New Year :D
By the time this chapter's been posted, I would have turned 21 in Korean years

yay!

Six

Eight



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Translator: ayszhang

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Chapter 8 of [Brother!](#)

Eight

All the stars will be wells with a rusty pulley. All the stars will pour out fresh water for me to drink...

—Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *The Little Prince*

Have you ever lost something important?

You know it still exists somewhere in this world, but you will never find it again, for your two paths are not meant to cross. You weep and you lament and you rage, but what has been lost will never come back.

Grownups always think children are silly. They think children have fits for nothing. They think it is bad behaviour.

For they have forgotten the love of their childhood and the heartbreak they had experienced as the price for growing up.

Xu Chuan stood outside the classroom of year six division three at Railroads No.1 Elementary. His hair was messy from the wind and his eyes bloodshot from the lack of sleep due to riding the hard sleeper.

It was recess and many children wearing their red scarves were running around and chatting in the hallway.

He watched as Xu Ping came out of the noisy classroom wearing a knit hat and carrying his army green canvas bag.

"Xu Ping," Mrs. Li said, "Your dad's here to pick you up. You can go home now."

Xu Ping kept his head down.

Xu Chuan took the spotlight, "Thank you, Mrs. Li." Then, he added, "How is Xu Ping doing lately?"

"He's doing well in his coursework," she replied, "It's just that he hasn't been getting along with another student in the class. They even got in a fight."

Xu Chuan put an arm around the boy's shoulders. "He's a kid, after all. I will talk to him."

Mrs. Li smiled. Xu Chuan nodded and left.

He led Xu Ping home in a hurry, and the two did not share a single word.

Three days ago, he received a telegram saying that Xu Zheng was missing and that he was to return as soon as possible. He asked for leave from work and rushed back from the wilderness in Qinghai. Even so, it was two days later by the time he arrived home.

He had barely gotten a wink of sleep these nights. The train rumbled through one tunnel after another, and the light and shadows whizzed over his face. Meanwhile, the other men in the carriage snored like the thunder. Xu Chuan could not sleep for his life. His eyes stayed wide open and watched the brown lamps flit past in the windows like shooting stars.

Sometimes it hit him that he led an exhausting life, working to the limit almost every day. He would wonder in the dark of night why his life ended up like this.

His father was sent to the [Pigsty](#) and their home was raided by the [Red Guard](#). He was about to marry his girlfriend, but she quickly abandoned him. He married Liu Yu, who was not right in the head. His first son was born. His second son was a retard....

He had long been beaten down by reality. The dreams he used to have in his early days were nothing but mere scraps now.

All these years, he had his hopes for his elder son, Xu Ping. The boy was smart and responsible. His grades were good and even Xu Zheng, who was never close to him, would listen to the boy.

He was very strict on this son. He saw Xu Ping's pains, but he never offered a word of comfort.

He was a selfish father. He loved his son, but he had no choice.

Yet, under this pressure, Xu Ping had taken care of his brother day in and day out without any mishaps. Even Xu Chuan felt grateful for this.

However, Xu Zheng had gone missing. The telegram couldn't include the details, so he rushed back to ask Xu Ping in person how this happened.

Xu Chuan sat down in the living room chair and said to Xu Ping standing in front of him. "Alright, talk."

Xu Ping didn't know where to begin. The matter was so messy and complicated. Which one was the reason behind it all?

Two dark green rings hung under his eyes. He hadn't been able to sleep ever since his brother went missing.

He had feared that this moment would come. All the effort he had put in to care for his brother was for show. If there was any meaning to his short, twelve-year life, it would have to be making this man, the most important person to him in this entire world, proud of him. But now he had to destroy this himself. He had to strip away his beautiful shell and expose the ugliness inside. He had to tell his

dad that the vicious, venomous demon inside was his true self.

Xu Ping took a deep breath. “Six days ago, I came home late ‘cause the class meeting ended late....”

He told the story slowly and in detail, not missing a single thing. Like a flaying, the words sliced him open and blood oozed out from within. He described watching Lu Jia beating up his brother and taking pictures. He described being ridiculed and beaten with a brick. He described the argument he had with Xu Zheng, the slaps and the kicks and the scolding. He described being pushed by Xu Zheng and his wounds ripping open. He even repeated the words he never should have said.

“Just go die. I don’t ever want to see you again.”

It was as though his soul was hacked into two halves by an invisible axe. One half was chained inside him. The hurt, the disappointment, the fury and the guilt burned him like fire. He couldn’t budge at all; teeth clenched and muscle taut, he could barely feel half of his body. The other half was flying in the air like a kite. He had pretended to be a good brother for too long, and he should have known that this day would come, for the fake can never become real. He had finally let his dad down, finally exposed his ugly self to the most important person in his life. He would never shed any more tears for he had nothing else to cause him pain or fear.

He stood in silence before his dad, head bowed low, after he finished telling his tale.

He was wearing khaki pants and a blue top. His mom had made the knit hat on his head which was so worn that the threads were frayed.

“Take off your hat,” Xu Chuan ordered.

Xu Ping took it off and held on to it, revealing his pale scalp and white bandages.

Xu Chuan ordered again, “Come closer.”

Xu Ping took a step forward.

Xu Chuan brought his right hand back and slapped the boy across the face

hard.

Xu Ping tumbled back from the impact and stayed standing only by holding onto the table. His ears began to ring.

His dad said something else, but all he could hear were trains chugging and chooing inside his skull.

He shook his head a few times.

He could make out a few words. "You...I...beat you...."

He didn't even process the thought before he blurted out, "A father has every right to beat his son."

Xu Chuan slapped him again.

This time he couldn't hear anything.

He watched his dad's wrath like watching a silent film. He felt no pain as his dad barked at him so fervently that spit was flying out. As he held the hat in hand, he wondered why he had ever been so afraid of upsetting and disappointing him.

He couldn't think of a reason at all.

His mind began to wander. He recalled his mom when she was knitting this hat for him. So quiet and pretty, no one would have said she was a retard.

Dad must really love Mom, Xu Ping thought, he wouldn't hit me until I took the hat off. He didn't want Mom to know and weep from up above.

Xu Ping was really glad. He became certain that Lu Jia's mom was lying. She was the mother of that son of a bitch, after all. His dad didn't marry his mom because he was dirty or whatever, and he wasn't some kid they'd picked up....

How nice would it be if the class meeting hadn't gone overtime? Then Xu Zheng wouldn't have gotten mad at him, and he wouldn't have gone to the bookstand. He would have taken Xu Zheng home before Lu Jia got to him first. They would have avoided this episode and grown up without a pain.

He looked at his father. The man was in middle age but still very handsome. His perfectly chiselled face, tall build and solid shoulders would have gotten him a

second marriage if not for his retard son.

If and when that happened, his dad would have another child – a healthy, active and clever child.

But they would not be Xu Zheng.

Mom had died. He would never have another brother.

With that in mind, Xu Zheng seemed awfully pitiful.

Xu Ping interrupted, “Don’t remarry, Dad.”

Xu Chuan stopped, angry and confused.

Xu Ping said, “Xu Zheng will come back and if he doesn’t, I’ll go look for him. If he dies, then I will repay him with my life.”

Xu Chuan had been through so much in his lifetime and built a full suit of armour for himself that he thought nothing could ever bring him down, but his son’s words easily punched through to his heart, leaving it shrivelled in a ball.

He glared at his elder son with a wild look of a madman. He wanted to scream at the boy: “You’re a disappointment. You’re a bad brother!” But he couldn’t find it in himself to say so anymore.

He clawed at his own chest. He needed to be alone for now.

Xu Chuan waved his hand, telling Xu Ping to get his sorry self back into his room.

[For more information:](#)

[Red Guards](#)

ayszhang: I had a friend stay over for the last few days and I got no translation done T_T Gonna try to work hard this weekend to make next week's update.

[Seven](#)

[Nine](#)



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9

Translator: ayszhang



SURPRISE

[Brother chapter 9!](#)

Nine

I do not ask to walk smooth paths

Nor bear an easy load.

I pray for strength and fortitude To climb the rock-strewn road.

—Gail Brook Burkett

Xu Ping sprawled on his bed and fell asleep.

There were two single beds side by side in the room. Every winter, their dad

would push the two together and the brothers would huddle together for warmth on the cold nights.

Xu Ping had bad circulation and his hands and feet were always icy to the touch in winter; Xu Zheng was smaller in size but radiated heat like a fire.

Snowy nights up north meant that the coal furnace couldn't make the room more than a few degrees warmer. The moment you go under the freezing covers, you must have a tremendous amount of willpower not to jump out shivering like a fish in broiling oil.

On these nights, Xu Ping would pretend to have a lot of homework and delay going to bed. Only when Xu Zheng had warmed the bed would he quickly strip off his winter coat, jump under the covers and hug his brother tight.

Xu Zheng wouldn't complain even if he was woken up, and would turn around to pull his brother who was a head taller than he into his arms.

And Xu Ping would ask every time, "Are you cold?"

Xu Zheng would nod honestly but still stick his brother's cold hands under his own winter pajamas.

Warming his brother's hands and feet was one of li'l Xu Zheng's jobs.

His brother might have been impatient with him during the day but would always be very gentle on cold winter nights. His brother wouldn't tell him to go away or call him stupid. Even if he made some mistakes, he would be quickly forgiven. If the older boy was in a good mood, he might even ask the younger boy about his day at school, what he did, whom he met, what he had for lunch and such. Xu Zheng always took a long time before he came up with his answer, and by then, Xu Ping was likely nodding off. His breaths brushed Xu Zheng's neck like the itchy swipes of a dog's wagging tail, making an entire side of his body tingly.

That was a Xu Zheng that his brother never knew, one who would tuck the taller boy in snugly with clumsy hands so that he may have a toasty dream.

It was already dark by the time Xu Ping woke up. Someone had taken his shoes off and pulled the covers over him so that he managed to find some sleep after

days of insomnia.

None of the lights were on in the house.

He couldn't hear anything except the ticking of the clock in the living room.

Dad was probably out.

The spot where he had been slapped was still stinging but he let out a sigh of relief.

He gulped down a glass of water from the kitchen and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. He felt revived.

He glanced at the clock when he went back to the living room. Under the dim moonlight, he saw the hands point to eight-thirty.

He had slept for nearly nine hours!

Whiff. A red dot lit up in the dark only to disappear in the next moment.

Xu Ping stopped dead in his tracks.

The master bedroom door was not fully shut, and he could see the large, still figure that was his dad seated deep in the weave chair. His back was slightly hunched as though something heavy was weighing down on his spine. He had his arms rested on the knees while a lit cigarette rested between his left index and middle fingers. Its feeble red light winked in and out of existence.

Something about this picture made Xu Ping's heart ache.

Lazy smoke slithered up into the dark air like an ugly beast preparing its attack. The red light glowed at the lift of a hand, and the white paper turned into bleak ash only to fall down without a sound.

Xu Ping turned around, wanting to pretend like he had not seen anything and walk away.

"Xu Ping?" Xu Chuan asked with his back to the door.

Xu Ping could only stop and answer, "It's me."

The two fell quiet.

They were the two closest people, yet they couldn't find the words to hold a

conversation.

Xu Chuan killed the smoke and, along with it, all his dark emotions.

“Hungry? I’ll fix us something.”

Neither of them said a word during the meal.

The tomatoes were a bit burnt and the omelette had bits of eggshell in it. Xu Ping spat out the chewed shells and continued eating his rice.

“Have more veggies.” Xu Chuan put some chives into his son’s bowl.

Xu Ping glanced up. “Thank you, Dad.”

Clunk. The clock hand jumped to nine-thirty. Normally, Xu Zheng would be in bed at this time.

The father and son stopped eating at the same time, and a heavy silence hovered in the room.

“I’ll clean up. You go to bed; you have school tomorrow.” Xu Chuan pulled back his chair and stood up to tidy the dishes.

Xu Ping had just come out from the bathroom after brushing his teeth when he heard a knock at the door.

There was the splish-splash of water coming from the kitchen with the occasional clinking of dishes and chopsticks.

Xu Ping opened the door to find a plump middle-aged woman with long permed curls standing in the lightless hall. She was wearing a blue satin one-piece while carrying a plastic net bag in one hand.

Xu Ping found her familiar but couldn’t put his finger on it.

“Who are you looking for, ma’am?”

The woman pulled a smile and asked, “Is Lao-Xu in?”

Xu Ping nodded and turned around to get his dad.

Xu Chuan dried his hands and went to see the visitor while Xu Ping dried the

clean dishes and placed them back into the cupboard.

He could hear quiet voices from the doorway. His dad was probably having small talk with the visitor. Their voices were too low and he couldn't make out the words.

In less than five minutes, he heard the door close and the lock clinking into place.

Xu Ping walked out of the kitchen to see his dad placing the bag full of canned fruits on the dinner table.

"Who was that?"

Xu Chuan didn't answer.

Xu Ping rummaged through the bag; peach, pineapple, mandarin orange, and even two jars of lychee which was hard to find even if you had the money to buy it.

At that time, canned fruits were a rare delicacy.

Xu Ping instantly became curious of this generous madam. "Who was that? Why did she give us so much canned fruit?"

Xu Chuan replied, "You've seen her before. She's the [commissar](#) of the Cultural Troupe, your classmate Lu Jia's mom."

"Better that he dies! His mom's half a retard, and his dad wasn't clean either. That's why they got married, and their kid, Xu Zheng, turned out a retard, too! My mom said so, that's what everyone at work says! Retard is in the genes! So when Xu Ping gets married, his son's gonna be just like his brother, all retards!"

Xu Ping stared at his dad.

Xu Chuan stayed mute.

Xu Ping asked, "And you took it, Dad?"

Xu Chuan said, "Yes, I did."

Xu Ping nodded. "Good."

He pushed open the living room windows. A round moon hung in the sky and a cool breeze blew in from afar.

He spotted Lu Jia's mom walking out from his building, her high heels knocking sharply on the concrete. The faulty streetlights were flashing on and off as clouds of moths fluttered about.

Xu Ping didn't know where he got the strength to hurl the dozen or so jars out the window.

BANG! CRACK! The glass shattered into a million pieces, scattering across the concrete. The sweet stench of fruits could be smelled from where he was.

The startled woman turned around.

Xu Ping shrieked out the window. "We don't want your fucking fruit! Give me back my brother! Give 'im back!"

The lights of the homes in the complex turned on and the residents were poking their heads out to see.

Xu Ping was jumping in fury as he held onto the windowsill. "So what if he's a retard?! What right do you have to bully him?! Tell Lu Jia to come! Why didn't he come to school?! He was fine beating me with a brick, wasn't he?! You stinkin' moneybags think you can do anything! He should come to finish the job, then! Get him here! Imma kill him! Imma—"

Xu Chuan grabbed his son by the waist and pulled him away from the window.

The boy's nail broke on the windowsill and began to bleed.

The neighbours were talking and even the houses on the other side had their lights on.

The woman scurried off, not even looking at where she was going, and the sound of her clattering heels faded away.

Xu Chuan closed the windows.

His son was sitting on the floor, crying with clenched teeth.

"Why did you accept her gift?!"

"She came to apologize."

“Do you know what she says about us behind our backs?! She said you married Mom because of your status. She said retard is in the genes. She said Xu Zheng’s a retard because Mom was a retard!”

“What they choose to say is up to them.”

Xu Ping questioned with eyes red with fury. “Are we your sons or not?!”

Xu Chuan really wanted to slap the boy, but he stopped himself.

He pulled his son off from the floor, barking, “What do you want me to do?! Beat them up to exact revenge?! You want me to go beat up Lu Jia and his mom?!”

Xu Ping was dumbfounded. He knew that it was not the right thing to do, but he was in so much pain. It felt like he was walking barefoot on the scorching road to hell, and he just wanted to drag everyone who had hurt him along with him.

After a long pause, Xu Chuan finished, “Sorry, but I can’t do that.”

Xu Ping cried, “I hate you, Dad!”

Xu Chuan grabbed his son’s shoulders. It took all his will to stop the rage from taking over.

He had always thought that being a father was one of the most difficult things in life, but never had he ever wanted to explode with anger.

“You look down on Xu Zheng. You think he’s stupid and clingy. You think he’s always holding you back and making the classmates bully you and laugh at you, don’t you?! And when I don’t exact revenge like the way you want, you think I don’t care about you, don’t love you, so you hate me. Is that right?!”

Xu Ping just kept sobbing.

Xu Chuan thought he must have been a failure of a father. How did he raise a son like this? The boy understood nothing. This was nothing compared to the hardships that life had in store.

He said to Xu Ping, “Your brother can see no one else. He’s slow to feel pain. He can’t feel anything when people bully him or ridicule him. There’s only one person in this world who can hurt him. Now tell me who that is!”

Xu Ping was crying so hard he could not breathe.

He knew. He had always known. His brother had gone missing because he told him to go die. It was his sin and it trapped him in like a tar pit, suffocating him.

Xu Chuan let go of his son.

"I am a failure of a father, and you are a failure of a brother! I'll say this once. Never hold someone else responsible for your own responsibilities! You think life is unfair. Life is unfair to each and every person. What you must do is to shoulder the responsibility that belongs to you. You must not fear and run away, and do not blame someone else!"

Xu Ping was gasping for air while he said, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry...."

He had been waiting, waiting for the chance to apologize to his brother and to beg for his forgiveness.

All his hate and anger was not aimed at others but rather a reflection of himself.

He hated himself more than anyone else.

Xu Chuan pulled his son close. "You're a man! And men don't cry!" He wiped the boy's face clumsily. "Just remember to say sorry to your brother when he comes back."

Xu Ping nodded as he choked on his tears.

"Don't use the word 'hate' so easily again. You'll find out when you grow up that there is so much hate in this world that two strangers could murder each other in cold blood over disputes about money or differences in values. If you hate your family, then you have no reason to keep living. Don't talk about dying so easily, either. Dying is nothing; everyone dies. But living is much harder. Remember, Xu Ping, you will only have one brother, Xu Zheng, and Xu Zheng will only have you as his one brother. I will die too one day, so if you really feel sorry, you must live on for his sake!"

Xu Ping nodded as tears trickled down his face.

Xu Chuan didn't know how much of this the young boy understood. No one knew better than him how heavy a burden it was.

But Xu Ping was still young and Xu Chuan could still support them for now.

He really wanted Xu Ping to promise him that he would never abandon his brother after their dad died, but in the end, he couldn't say it.

Xu Chuan sighed and brought his son in for a hug.

ayszhang: I didn't even realize it was Valentine's!!! That's why I'm releasing this before any proofreaders has worked on it <3 Wish y'all a happy Valentine's and remember it's also Single's Awareness Day :'D

[Eight](#)

[Ten](#)



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10

Translator: ayszhang

Proofreader: happyBuddha



Chapter 10 of [Brother!](#)

Ten

You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavour, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.

You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.

Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all *who are* in the house.

—Matthew 5:13-15

Brrring!

The cranky, bald math teacher, Mr. Ma, was still screaming from his spot behind the podium when the bell rang.

"I only made the test harder by a tiny, weeny bit, and everyone fails! The lowest mark was nine! NINE! Is this even possible for a student your level?! Huh?! Even a blindfolded pig would score higher than this! You think you're still in kindergarten? You'll be taking the junior high entrance exam this year! You won't get into a good senior high if you don't get into a good junior high, and if you don't get into a good senior high, you won't get into a good university! And if you don't get into a good university? Hah! I'll be frank with you, your life will be O-V-E-R, over!"

Xu Ping raised his right hand.

"WHAT?!" Mr. Ma yelled.

"The bell rang, Mr. Ma," Xu Ping stood up and said.

The classroom went silent and the entire class turned their eyes to the boy.

Ma Guozhong slapped the podium. "Are you implying I'm deaf?! So what if the bell rang? You all have to sit there in your seats until I dismiss you!"

Xu Ping replied very calmly, "But, sir, I can't sit down, my butt hurts. I have to go home and take a shit."

The class burst out in laughter.

Ma Guozhong was so angry his lips were shivering. He flipped through the papers on the desk, planning to pick on Xu Ping next. But, when he found the boy's examination, he saw that Xu Ping had scored seventy-six, a high score in the class. There were only maybe four or five kids who had higher scores than he did. Unable to express his rage, he became even more furious.

Then, someone sneered. "Take a shit? You mean go looking for that retard in the outhouse?"

The laughter soon died down as everyone sneaked nervous glances towards Xu Ping.

It was then that Ma Guozhong recalled this class's homeroom teacher telling

him about a student whose brother had gone missing. The family was going through a tough time and she had asked him to look out for the student.

Xu Ping turned around and answered indifferently, “That’s right, everybody knows! My brother’s a retard who was kicked out of school. He can barely remember the way home. My mom died and my dad has a tough job, so I have to go looking for my brother as soon as school ends. We don’t have any other family. He might be a retard but I can’t just leave him, can I?”

The classroom fell silent. Every student’s face burned with a strange sense of shame that made them uncomfortable in their own seats.

Even Mr. Ma started to feel bad. He tidied the papers and his books while spitting, “Just you wait till tomorrow.” Then, he left out the door.

After Xu Ping packed his own bag, he looked up to find quite a few eyes on him. He cracked a smile at them and they all whipped their faces around as though burned by his gaze. No one dared look him straight in the eyes.

Almost every single student in this class had badmouthed Xu Ping’s retard brother. Now that his brother was missing, the gossip became evil curses and Xu Ping’s smile became spiked with judgement.

As he was leaving, Lu Jia was coming back in from the bathroom with a bucket of water since he was on cleaning duty. The two met in a standoff at the stairwell.

Xu Ping stuck his right hand into his pant pocket where he had the folding knife that he used to sharpen his pencils.

He looked at Lu Jia from the corner of his eye with an indifferent expression as though waiting for the other boy to react first.

Lu Jia wanted to snort and call him a piece of shit like he had done before, but for some reason, his hairs stood on end. There was something different about the skinny boy, but Lu Jia couldn’t put his finger on it.

A leg stuck out from nowhere and the bucket tumbled down the stairs, splashing water everywhere.

Lu Jia turned and screamed, “Who the fuck was that?!”

Beside Xu Ping was a tan, burly boy with a buzz cut who looked at him with a nasty sneer, “Me. Got a problem with that?!”

Lu Jia’s gaze bounced between He Zhi and Xu Ping before finally nodding. “I see how it is. Just you wait.” Then, he went downstairs to get his bucket.

He Zhi gave a scoff and wanted to give chase, but Xu Ping stopped him.

He Zhi spat on the ground in disgust. “Asshole.”

Xu Ping nudged him before heading downstairs himself. “Relax. I don’t need you to stick up for me, okay?”

He Zhi rushed after him. “I don’t know what I saw in that guy. I’d thought he was a good friend.”

Xu Ping didn’t respond.

Then, He Zhi kept babbling to Xu Ping all the way until the school entrance. Xu Ping asked, “What can I do for you, *Da-Zhi*? ”

He Zhi scratched his head. “I thought I’d go looking for your brother with you.”

Xu Ping was touched, but he still refused. “You know what my brother looks like? Alright, just drop it. The police are on it, anyway.”

He Zhi looked at the other boy like he had something else to say, but Xu Ping interrupted him impatiently. “I’ll see you later then.”

All He Zhi could get out of his mouth in the end was “okay.”

His friend seemed to have changed into a different person in the past few weeks. Like a water bottle refilled with [erguotou](#), it appeared transparent like the water that was previously present but it was bound to explode sooner or later.

As he watched the other boy shrinking into the distance, he suddenly shouted, “Ping-zi!”

Xu Ping didn’t look back and only waved his hand half-heartedly.

Xu Ping paid five cents for a local newspaper from a street vendor.

He shook out the pages as he stood on the street. He skipped over the

headlines, the international events on page two and the economy section on page three to the local news.

"House caught fire this morning. One dead, three wounded."

"Regular bus pickpocket arrested by undercover officer while passengers cheered."

"Free admissions at [Beijiao](#) Zoo in accordance with October 4th International Animal Day attracted numerous visitors."

After skimming everything, he found nothing on missing children or child trafficking. Xu Ping went through the ad section slipped in between the other sections and found the "Missing Person" ad that his dad had been posting for the last three weeks.

"Xu Zheng. M. 8yo. Last seen Tieshan Dist., City of X, Sept 8th 1983, wearing red tank top, blue shorts. Reward for persons with info. Pls contact Xu Chuan."

Below it was a black and white photo of Xu Zheng and the address and phone number of his dad's workplace.

The newspaper flapped loudly in the cool autumn breeze. Xu Ping folded the newspaper back neatly and put it in his bag.

Autumn was right around the corner.

The poplar leaves had turned gold and gently floated down to the ground along with the refreshing west wind. The apparel on the streets was no longer white tank tops but blue Mao suits that had four square pockets on the front. There was the occasional soldier wearing green army attire, too. Street vendors began to sell baked sweet potatoes and fried chestnuts, the rich, sweet scent of which could be smelled from a ways off.

Xu Ping stood on the street watching the people walking to and fro.

Reporting to the police, posting ads, putting up flyers on power poles....

They had done all that could be done, yet Xu Zheng still had not returned.

Dad asked for a month-long break and went out searching every day. Xu Ping did not want to go to school either, but he got scolded by his dad when he

brought it up.

Suddenly, Xu Ping's hand darted out for a kid who walked past him. The kid jumped in fright and turned around with a startled expression, but the small eyes and thin brows were as different from Xu Zheng as could be.

Xu Ping let go of the poor child. "Sorry, wrong person."

The kid's friends pushed him along their way while grumbling under their breaths.

The old man selling newspapers asked, "Looking for someone?"

"Yes," Xu Ping replied, "I'm looking for my brother. He's missing." Meanwhile, he took out the newspaper he had just put away and pointed at Xu Zheng's photo. "Have you seen him, sir?"

The man put on his glasses and squinted before shaking his head. "No, 'fraid not."

Xu Ping thought he would be disappointed, but perhaps the disappointment so far had been too much. He just nodded as though he had expected the answer. "Thank you."

The old man pitied him. "Ya called the police yet? Times are a-changin', I tell ya. My boy was sixteen when he joined [the Great Linkup](#) and went all the way to Guangzhou, and he came back safe and sound. A lotta traffickers nowadays, y'know, and when they see a nice lookin' kid they grab 'em and sell 'em out in the boondocks. They don't care if the family's sad or not."

Xu Ping wanted to say something back but he couldn't find his voice.

He remembered that the police came knocking one night saying that they had fished the corpse of a child from the river and they wanted Xu Chuan to go into the station to check. Xu Chuan rushed off and didn't come back until late in the night. When he did, he collapsed on the weave chair and stayed there for a long time. Xu Ping clung to the door frame and his legs were weak and trembling by the time Xu Chuan spoke with a sigh.

"It wasn't your brother."

Xu Ping said goodbye to the old man and wandered around, grabbing anyone

who looked like Xu Zheng from behind. Several times he saw the parents holding hands with the child, but he still rushed forward with a tiny spark of hope.

He had always hoped that he didn't have to go home after school and accompany Xu Zheng to the sandbox, but now he had lost the reason to go home. He was too scared to even look under the table whenever he walked by the living room – his brother's red bucket was under it. Seeing it made him think of Xu Zheng waiting for him every day with his legs tucked in on the chair, and this tortured Xu Ping so much he was racked with pain.

The sun was setting when he finally headed home.

It was the same Xinmin Road, the same comic book stand. Xu Ping walked past it indifferently; he did not want to read that stuff anymore.

A thousand heroes could not compare to that stupid brother of his.

He paced into the courtyard of the Cultural Troupe's complex with his head down only to bump into a familiar someone wearing black square-framed glasses and a grey jacket.

It was Zhang Jinmin running in such a rush that his glasses were slipping off his ears. He rejoiced when he saw Xu Ping.

"Where have you been?! I've been looking for you for ages! Hurry! Come home with me now! The police found your brother!"

For more information:

[The Great Linkup](#) (page 41)

More on [Mao pop culture](#)

ayszhang: Xu Zheng's back!!!....or is he?!

WE NEED PROOFREADERS!!! If you have received formal education in English (the more the better!) or are adept at prescriptive grammar, please email Dairytea at chineseb1(at)yahoo.com. It takes me a lot of time to read over my own translations multiple times to find mistakes, so please pitch in if you can! <3

Thank you!

[Nine](#)

[Eleven](#)



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11

Translator: ayszhang

Proofreaders: happyBuddha, Kai, m@o



Chapter 11 of [Brother!](#)

Eleven

Give me a red rose[,] and I will sing you my sweetest song.

—Oscar Wilde, *The Nightingale and the Rose*

The door to the house was half-open, and he could hear conversation coming from the living room.

Xu Ping didn't push it open.

His breathing hitched and sweat dripped down the side of his face.

He had dreamt many a times his brother sitting in the chair in the living room,

telling him, “I’m back, *Gege*.” He would tear up from sheer joy and wake up crying.

Was this going to be another dream? And when he pushed that door open, was he going to find himself alone in bed in the middle of the night?

“Thank you, thank you...I really don’t know how to thank you enough....”

Xu Ping heard his father’s incoherent speech.

“Don’t mention it. The kid was actually brought in by an old fellow living at the Nanjiao Dump. He’d thought the kid was mute since he wouldn’t speak at all, and found it in his heart to look after the kid. Afterwards, he saw the missing persons ad and brought him into the station.”

“That’s right. I need to give him a proper thank you.”

“Your kid’s lucky to have met a good person. We get so many of these cases, and not even a third of them ever come back in one piece. Some of the parents have waited for so long their tears have run dry.”

“Thank you, thank you officers for all your hard work. Here, have some tea, and some fruits. Don’t hold back....”

The sounds died down again.

If this was a dream, he prayed to whoever was listening that he would not wake up.

He pushed on the door lightly.

There were three people sitting in the living room. One was a man in green police uniform sitting with his back to the door. Dad was sitting across from him with an overly-emotional expression, and beside him was a child covered with grime with his head hanging low.

Xu Ping stood at the doorway.

The policeman stood up, straightening his clothes. “Well, I brought your child back. I still have work back at the station, so I won’t take up any more of your time.”

Xu Chuan shook the man’s hand, repeating his gratitude while beckoning to Xu

Ping. "Come thank the officer. He brought your brother home."

Xu Ping had his eyes locked on Xu Zheng. He couldn't hear anything.

He took a step, and then another step. Every step he took, he anticipated falling into a dream state, but in the end, he stood before Xu Zheng, wide awake.

The boy's hair was long and filthy, and a disgusting stench exuded from him. He was wearing a patched-up men's undershirt that looked like it belonged in the trash. The skin on his neck and arms were black with grub, and his nails were caked with dirt.

In his dreams, his brother had always been clean and quiet like an angel. His brother would always talk to him and get him to play at the sandbox with him. His brother would smile and whine. But Xu Ping knew even as he dreamed that this was not real.

Xu Zheng had his head bowed and his shoulders were shaking. He was dirty and stinky like a beggar on the streets. He saw his older brother standing in front of him, but he didn't make a sound.

Xu Ping had thought he would rejoice like he did in the dreams, but in the end he just felt horrible.

He balled his fists tight so the tears wouldn't fall.

The trickling and splashing of water came from the bathroom, and then a squeak as the tap was twisted shut.

The door wasn't shut, and he could see from where he was in the living room his dad sitting on the small bathroom stool and holding Xu Zheng's arm.

"Come now, Xiao-Zheng, let's get those clothes off."

The boy wouldn't stop thrashing around.

Clutching the boy's arm, Xu Chuan tore off the undershirt that had just about turned black.

His rib bones were distinct under a thin layer of grey, grimy skin.

Xu Chuan was taken back by the sight, and he felt his nose and eyes sting.

He lowered his gaze and proceeded to the dirty pants.

"It must've been tough. Probably haven't had a proper meal all these weeks, huh? I'll make braised pork for you after we get you clean. You love braised pork, don't you?"

Xu Zheng didn't say anything. He was struggling against the hands that were trying to take off his pants.

Xu Chuan didn't expect an answer from his son either. Using brute force, he stripped Xu Zheng naked and turned him around to inspect. He let out a sigh of relief when he didn't find any injuries; the boy was just very bony.

He lifted up the pail of warm water he had prepared and poured it over the boy's head.

Xu Zheng became soaked from head to toe. The uncut hair plastered to his face, making him seem even smaller.

Xu Zheng started screaming out of shock.

The kettle in the kitchen started making bubbling sounds.

Xu Chuan shouted while he held on to his son's wrist. "Xu Ping, turn the stove off and pour the water into the thermos and bring one over here."

Xu Ping answered and got up from his seat in the living room.

The two green and red plastic thermos with grey innards were part of his mom's dowry. The couple had lived in run-down farmer housing in the nearby countryside during the toughest years of their life. There was no toilet, no kitchen, and they even had to go all the way to work if they wanted clean, boiled water.

Xu Ping filled up the thermos and plugged them with the wood corks before taking one to the bathroom.

He saw his dad attempting to rub soap on Xu Zheng while his brother was fighting back like his life depended on it.

"*Xiao-Zheng!* What are you doing, *Xiao-Zheng!* You're a good boy. Daddy's just trying to get you clean. Now behave!"

The moment the soap bar touched Xu Zheng, the boy let out a piercing shriek.

Xu Chuan grabbed his son by the shoulder. “What’s wrong, *Xiao-Zheng*? You love to be clean, don’t you? Who do you think I am? It’s Dad. Take a good look. It’s Dad!”

The man’s reply was a fist to his eye.

He stayed crouching, holding his eye, unable to get up for some time.

Xu Zheng took the chance to escape, leaving a trail of wet footprints.

He passed by his brother like the wind, not even sparing the other boy a glance.

Xu Ping put down the thermos and stood outside the bathroom for a long time.

His dad still had his back turned to the door. His shoulders were trembling and his hair was sprinkled with grey.

Xu Ping gently closed the door for his dad.

He followed the footprints to the master bedroom. There was a large wood closet against one wall, of which the doors were tightly shut.

It was dark outside and the curtains were not drawn. The stars were peaking in through the glass.

The room was dim save for the light from the living room that shone a little bit past the doorway only to be swallowed by the darkness before it reached the bed.

“Anybody there?” Xu Ping knocked the closet door.

Not a sound came from the closet.

Xu Ping pulled on the handle only to find it held close by the person inside.

“Are you there, *Xiao-Zheng*?”

No one answered.

Xu Ping closed the room door and drew the curtains.

It was pitch black now except for the slit of light under the door.

The darkness was usually a source of horror, but Xu Ping somehow found himself at ease.

He had a lot to say to his brother – the things that had been weighing on his mind and the dreams that stole sleep from him – and he wanted to tell his brother that he was sorry. But when it came down to it, he was scared. He was scared of seeing his brother's indifferent face. He was scared that his courage would disappear under the cold gaze.

Xu Ping stood before the closet, not knowing how to start.

Xu Zheng was once so close to him that he had trouble keeping the younger boy away. Now his brother wouldn't even answer a call of his name.

"Xiao-Zheng, are you not talking to me because you don't like me?

"Where have you been all this time? Dad and I had been looking for you. Dad posted an ad on the newspaper. He was really worried about you.

"I brought your bucket and shovel back and they're under the table now. Let's go to the sandbox tomorrow, okay?

"I'm sorry I was late that day and got mad at you. You were really angry, weren't you? I'm sorry, Xiao-Zheng, I won't ever do that again. I'll be sure to come home on time everyday....

"Are you listening, Xiao-Zheng?

"How's your leg? Does it still hurt where Lu Jia hit you?

"Dad was really mad. He slapped me for the first time 'cause I lost you. He said I'm not a good brother.

"I probably am a terrible brother, aren't I?

"You know, Xiao-Zheng, I think you got stronger. You hit Dad on his eye just now, and it hurt so much he was crying.

"You probably don't know what pain is, do you? The human body is really fragile and it would hurt with the smallest scratches or bumps, or when you trip and fall and bleed. And sometimes even when the body is fine, your heart hurts because of things in the world you just can't overcome. And when the pain's too much, you cry and this watery thing comes out from your eyes. So when

someone's crying, he must have been through a lot of tough stuff and we should feel sorry for him.

"Dad's hurting so much he's crying, Xiao-Zheng. Why don't we go cheer him up later?

"Are you listening, Xiao-Zheng?

"Mrs. Zhang said you ran away from their house yourself. Why did you...why did you run away?

"Are you mad at me, Xiao-Zheng? Did my words hurt you so much that you don't want to see me again?

"Hah.... What am I saying? Of course you're mad.

"You remember Mom? Mom was pretty and quiet, and your eyes look like hers. They all say Mom was stupid but I never thought so. She never got angry for no reason, and she made yummy mantou and baozi. When you smiled at her, she would smile back. She was so pretty, too. She was the best mom.

"You know, Xiao-Zheng, Dad made me take off the hat that Mom made before he beat me. They love each other so much, Dad doesn't want her to be upset in heaven. I'm really glad, Xiao-Zheng.

"What does it really mean to be a smart person or a retard? Mom could make buns and knit, and she'd smile at everyone. She wouldn't hurt a soul, but because she had trouble reading and writing and interacting with people, they called her stupid. And then there's assholes like Lu Jia who doesn't know how to do anything other than bully and terrorize people weaker than them. Yet they think people like him are smart. If this is the world we live in, then I'd rather be stupid.

"Did you hear me, Xiao-Zheng?

"After you went missing, I kept thinking, trying to figure out how you see this world. Do you really not understand what other people are saying, or do you just shut your ears and not listen to what you don't want to hear? Do you really not feel pain, or are you in so much pain that you can't even begin to describe it?

"I'm sorry, Xiao-Zheng. I promised Mom that I'd be a good brother.

"And I didn't do that. I did a lot of horrible things and said a lot of hurtful words, and I really hurt you.

"I'm sorry, Xiao-Zheng, I'm sorry. I'm a terrible brother."



The kind of thermos that people used in China back in the days XD my grandparents have one of these and still use them!

ayszhang: We are reaching the end of Book One!!! How do you guys like the story so far? :D

[Ten](#)

[Twelve](#)



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12

Translator: ayszhang

Proofreaders: happyBuddha, Kai, Lee, m@o



Book One Finale of [Brother!](#)

Twelve

You know, my flower... I am responsible for her. And she is so weak! She has four thorns, of no use at all, to protect herself against all the world...

—Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *The Little Prince*

The lights in the neighbouring buildings all lit up. The entire city was probably glowing with twinkling dots of light.

The family upstairs turned on their television and someone was singing the title sequence from the film, *Red Guards on Honghu Lake*.

Waters of Honghu, wave upon wave upon wave, my home lies on Honghu shores...

Xu Ping tugged on the closet door handle lightly and the door opened a crack before the person inside quickly pulled it back shut.

“Xiao-Zheng.”

No one replied.

Not even Xu Ping was sure how much of what he had just said made its way to his brother.

He banged on the door. “Can you come out, Xiao-Zheng? You’re mad and I apologize. Don’t hide from me.”

His brother did not answer.

Xu Ping waited for a long time before trying again, this time with more power.

The door was about to come open when Xu Zheng started screaming with fear.

“No! I won’t see you! I won’t see you!”

Xu Ping froze, dumbfounded, until he began to lose hope.

There was a part of him that told him he deserved this, while another part of him became heartbroken.

He asked while fighting back his tears. “Why don’t you want to see me, Xiao-Zheng? Do you really hate me that much? Do you really feel that way?”

He didn’t know what to do to fix everything. He had heard the grownups say, a fault confessed is half redressed. But Xu Ping had learned long ago that not all faults could be forgiven and not everything could refresh and start again.

Flowers fell, never to return to their stems; Mom died, never to return to them.

It seemed to Xu Ping that he had accidentally broken a precious vase, and he was sad and helpless staring at the shattered pieces on the floor. Only a slight push out of anger was needed to break it, but to repair it could take months and years of careful piecing together and gluing. Even if he was lucky and could fix it, the vase would be full of cracks and never be as beautiful as it had been.

With his two hands on the closet door, Xu Ping began to weep.

He wanted to apologize but it could not get to his brother, so the apology had no use.

He had lost it all for good – the brother who only saw him; the brother who told him “The sun is enough”; the brother who would use his own tiny body to warm his older brother.

The world was big, and there was only one person, Xu Zheng, who only had eyes for him. The devotion that had no restraint suffocated him at times, but most of the time, it made him stronger. He couldn’t be weak because there was someone who needed him. He couldn’t admit defeat even if his legs were going to give in because there was someone who depended on him.

He had always thought that his efforts were to win the attention of his dad, but what was it that kept him strong in the countless days when his dad was away? A tiny voice inside gave him the answer, and only Xu Ping could hear it.

He slumped onto the floor and bawled his eyes out.

He felt as though he had lost the most precious thing to him.

He had tried so hard to hide and stubbornly refused to admit that perhaps he also needed his retard brother.

All the fairytales retold the same ancient story. Those who do not appreciate what they have will lose everything they have, and it will be too late when they finally regret it.

He had been abandoned by his one and only brother.

He had been abandoned by the entire world.

Xu Chuan was making braised pork in the kitchen.

He chopped the ginger, garlic, star anise, cinnamon and chili pepper, and added oil in the wok. Then, he added sugar and after it melted, he added the pork belly and the chopped ingredients to fry. After the meat turned a dark scarlet, he moved the contents to a pot to stew for an hour. During this time, he put on the rice, made stir-fry tomato and eggs, and cooked some baby bok choy.

He even made a cold cucumber dish with soy sauce, vinegar, chili peppers and sesame oil, and served it in the big [blue-and-white](#) bowl.

The smoke was too much and he pushed open the window by the stove.

His left eye was still throbbing a little but he could still see. He could see all the stars in the night sky clearly. Some of them he knew but most of them were nameless as they sparkled in the darkness.

The sky was cloudless. It was going to be a clear, sunny day tomorrow.

He hummed along with the television upstairs as he worked.

[The sun's almost gone down the west; the Nansi Lake is quiet as I play my beloved willow pipa and sing that lovely tune...](#)

He had a good voice and would sometimes fill in for his colleague and sing a few songs if they could not perform.

He had been too tired recently, and only after his younger son came home did he feel a sense of relief.

This family had become whole once again and life could go on. There was nothing better than this when one was his age, an age when one had been through all the challenges that life had to throw at him.

He brought the dishes to the table and set the table. He even took out the half bottle of Hongxing erguotou from the shelf. He was going to have a good meal with his sons.

He knocked on the bedroom door. “Dinner’s ready!”

The only one who came out was Xu Ping with his eyes red and puffy.

“Tell your brother to come out for dinner.”

Xu Ping stayed silent for some time.

Xu Chuan tapped his chopsticks against the table lightly.

“There’s no use, Dad. Xiao-Zheng won’t see me. He’s hiding in the closet ‘cause he doesn’t want to see me. He hates me.”

Xu Chuan sighed at the sight of his son’s lowered head. “He’s your brother!”

Xu Ping stayed quiet yet again.

Xu Chuan didn't want to get angry and ruin the night. He got up to fetch his other son himself.

"Xiao-Zheng, dinner's ready. I made braised pork." He knocked the closet door.
"Your brother's gonna finish it all if you don't come out soon."

No sound came from the closet.

Xu Chuan knocked again. "Xiao-Zheng?"

He tried the handle to find the boy fighting to keep it closed on the other side.

When he pulled a little harder, Xu Zheng started to scream. "I'm not leaving! I won't see *Gege*!"

Xu Chuan tried again patiently, "C'mon, Xiao-Zheng. Your brother misses you a lot. You haven't seen each other for so long. Isn't Xu Ping your favourite?"

But Xu Zheng only repeated. "I'm not leaving! I won't see *Gege*!"

Xu Chuan persisted. "He already apologized. He knows he did the wrong thing. Why don't you forgive him, yeah?"

Xu Zheng made stomping noises inside the closet.

A little angry by now, Xu Chuan yanked on the handle only for his younger son to start shrieking again.

Xu Ping watched as his dad walked out from the bedroom and took a seat at the table.

"Let's eat," his dad said weakly.

His dad picked up his chopsticks, lined them up on the table and took some bok choy. He left it in his bowl and pushed some rice into his mouth.

Xu Ping picked up his chopsticks unenthusiastically. He wasn't hungry at all, but he had to eat.

The father and son ate in silence. No one moved towards the juicy, tender braised pork in the middle.

The rich maroon coloured meat was covered with bits of cilantro. After being stewed for so long, it would just melt on your tongue. A single whiff of the sweet sauce was enough to make anyone's mouth water. A dish like this was almost impossible to come by except for Chinese New Year's. Not only was pork belly expensive, his dad didn't have the time to spend hours on one dish.

The delicious braised pork slowly cooled. After the steam disappeared, white bits of fat began to form on top of the sauce.

"Eat the meat," Xu Chuan said to his son.

Xu Ping looked down as he stuffed rice down. "We don't get braised pork that often. Let's save it for *Xiao-Zheng*. He likes it."

After a few moments of silence, Xu Chuan threw his chopsticks down and pushed himself up from the table.

Xu Ping gasped, thinking his dad was about to beat him, and raised his arms in defence only to see his dad storm off towards the bedroom.

CLUNK! The door was kicked in. His dad roared, "You get out here, Xu Zheng!"

The closet door hit the wall. His brother screamed, "No! No!"

Xu Chuan thundered, "What do you think you're doing?! You leave home for a month without a peep. Who said you could do that?! You know how worried we were?! Then you come back and you hide in the closet. You can hide today, but can you hide forever?! You say you won't see your brother?! Then you still know he's your brother! So what if he hits you and scolds you? He's already regretted it and apologized, and even if he doesn't say a thing, he's still your brother! He's taken care of you ever since you were born, taking you to and from school, buying you things you like, taking you out to play, sticking up for you and getting into fights for you, carrying you to the hospital everyday for shots when you were sick. Are you telling me you forgot all this in one month?! You won't see him? What makes you think you can do that! What have you ever done for him?! You get out here! You get out here right now!"

Xu Ping left his meal and rushed in to calm his father. "Dad! Dad, don't force him. He doesn't understand...."

He saw his brother's head buried in a heap of clothes while his small legs kicked

around wildly. One hand was holding onto the frame of the closet while the other was being pulled on by his dad.

He cried, “No! I won’t see Gege!”

Xu Chuan was seething with rage now, his eyes bulging. “You get out here! You don’t think of him as your brother. Does that mean you don’t see me as your dad either?! What are you doing in my closet then?! Get out of here! Get out! I never had an ungrateful bastard like you for a son!”

Xu Ping heard his brother yell while fighting back. “I don’t like you! I don’t like you, Daddy!”

He wanted to leap over and cover his brother’s mouth but he was too late.

Xu Chuan froze at the young boy’s words and then his wrath took over. He let go of the boy’s arm and went looking for a stick, and when he couldn’t find one, he took the long wooden ruler on the desk and whipped it towards Xu Zheng.

Crack! The ruler broke in two.

Xu Ping was standing between his brother and dad. Blood trickled from the corner of his eye.

Time seemed to have slowed down. Xu Ping saw the ruler flying towards his brother and his body reacted before his brain. The place where he was hit felt cool at first like an ice cube rubbing against his skin. He saw an array of emotions appearing on his dad’s face: surprise, fury, heartbreak, regret and more. He had never thought that so many emotions could exist on one person’s face at one time. He kind of wanted to laugh, and then the pain hit him like a bullet.

He couldn’t keep his left eye open at all. Tears kept flowing out. He probably looked so ridiculous right now he’d better not let anyone see.

He heard his dad rushing over and asking, “Did I get the eye?! Did I get the eye?!”

He shook his head. “No, but the wind is making me cry. Just get me a cold towel and I’ll be fine, Dad.”

He heard Xu Chuan run out, stumbling.

It stung when the tears ran over the wound.

Xu Ping covered his face, not wanting his brother to see his bloody face.

He reached behind himself trying to find his brother. “Are you okay?”

Xu Zheng did not answer.

Xu Ping didn’t mind. “Dad was just angry. He didn’t mean what he just said.”

He paused before continuing. “Dad won’t disown you. Even if the day comes that he won’t take care of you, I’ll be with you. Even if you don’t like me or don’t want to see me, I’ll be with you forever as long as you still need me.”

Every word that came out of his mouth tugged at his cheek muscles, making more blood flow out. Every sentence was like a flower blossoming from a bed of flesh.

“Can you tell me,” he asked his brother, “Why you don’t want to see me?”

“Do you really hate me?” he asked again.

It was after a really long time before he heard his brother’s quiet response. “I’m sorry.”

Xu Ping’s heart began to fall, tumbling down to a deep, cold place.

When he was about to freeze over, he heard his brother’s slow confession.

“I can’t see Gege. I like Gege, but Gege doesn’t want to see me. I didn’t listen to Gege. Gege told me to go die. I didn’t die. I’m sorry.”

Xu Ping stood there dumbly until he heard a sobbing sound coming from somewhere. Was that Xiao-Zheng crying? He touched his own face to find it wet with hot tears.

He spun around and hugged his brother.

Xu Zheng struggled against it, but Xu Ping held him tight.

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry. I’m sorry....” He started to ramble in his brother’s ear. “Don’t die, Xiao-Zheng. You have to live on. I want to see you every single day. We’re going to spend every day from now on together.”

This time, this time he was going to tell his brother everything properly.

Xu Zheng's movements died down but his eyes remained shut.

"Open your eyes and look at me, *Xiao-Zheng*"

Xu Zheng shook his head furiously.

"I haven't seen you, *Gege*. I'm dead. I really wanted to die. I kept walking and walking and...."

Xu Ping slapped his hand over his brother's mouth.

"You're still alive, *Xiao-Zheng*. We're both alive. Neither of us can die."

"I'm sorry, *Gege*," his brother apologized.

He cried with his brother in his arms. He felt that his heart was swimming in boiling lava and his skin and bones were melting.

There would never be another Xu Zheng.

This idiot was the most precious gift that destiny bestowed upon him.

He had almost lost him, but now he had returned to him.

He swore to himself. By his blood and his tears, he swore that he would always be good to his brother. He would use his everything to give his brother a happy life. He would do anything it took even if that meant giving up his own.

END OF BOOK ONE

I hope you're not hungry 'cause...



Stir-fry tomatoes and eggs



Red braised pork



Baby bok choy (usually stir-fried with garlic and oil)



Cold dressed cucumber

For more information:

[Braised pork](#) (English recipe of Shanghai-style)

[Tomatoes and eggs](#)

[Red Guards on Honghu Lake](#)

[Railroad Guerillas](#)

[Clip](#) from movie of the song Xu Chuan sang

ayszhang: Hope you liked Book One :') that was an emotional but sweet ending if you ask me!

[Eleven](#)

[Book Two](#)



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